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Transforming Transitions: The performance of motherhood and
the school choice process

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of
Professional Doctorate in Education

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Abstract

Giving parents a choice regarding which schools educate their children has been central to the discourse of school choice in England for many years. This choice and the capacity to make it has implications for all concerned. However, little research has been done on the impact this choice, and the transition has on the way that women perform motherhood during this time. This study aimed to investigate and understand the effect of the school choice process on the mothers of children undergoing this transition and the ways they perform motherhood. Carried out in a small, rural area in East Anglia, this case study used a narrative approach to interview 15 mothers who had been through or were going through the process. The results of the research show that the transition to secondary school was a critical site of performativity and a catalyst for the women's exploration of how they performed motherhood. Also, the research showed that the mothers all placed an importance on the local community as part of their performance of motherhood, linking the physical with the performative arenas. Contrary to previous research, the engagement with the process and the experiences of the mothers were not shared and were carried out on a private basis. This research leads to a greater understanding of the impact of the school choice process on mothers and their performance of motherhood and expands upon the decisions made and the way the educational market operates.

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"How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another."

— Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Chapter 1

Area Of Study And Introduction

Secondary School Choice In England

In England, schooling (or an alternative) is compulsory for children under the age of 18 and, during this time, children may attend multiple schools depending on their geographical location and age. In 1988, England strengthened policies that gave parents the right to express a preference for which schools they wanted their children to attend. Choice has been a feature of several international school systems for many years (France introduced school choice in the 1960's, Chile in the 1980s and Sweden in the 1990's), and has resulted in market mechanisms in education (Musset 2012, Chubb and Moe 1992). By 2012, 23 OECD countries allowed parents to choose a suitable school for their child if there are places available. In England, parents can express a preference for which primary and secondary school their children attend and this is known as the school choice process. For those who advocate parental rights, it is legitimate for parents to have freedom of choice and, for many; it has a fundamental impact, which enables them to do the best for their children. It is also claimed that choice provides equality of opportunity for all (Ryan and Heise 2002, Chubb and Moe 1992). However, the other side of the debate argues that school choice can aggravate inequalities and lead to the sorting of schools based on socio-economic status, ethnicity, ability and even gender (Harvey 2005; Hatcher 1998a; Waslander and Thrupp 1995; Exley 2012a; Dudley-Marling and Baker 2012; Apple 2000).

Ideological arguments aside, school choice in England is not straightforward; parents are encouraged to engage with the different schools their children may attend; this engagement can mimic the activities and chattels of hard sell commercial concerns. Parents are expected to take part in online research, comparing complex statistical data; read marketing information such as prospectuses and they are 'sold to' at open days and other events (Rapp 2000, Burgess and Briggs 2006, Taylor 2002). Although parents are those targeted by the school choice process, children are also involved, and it can be a period of anxiety and challenge for all. Engagement, which is not consistent across all parental groups, is hard work (Wilkins 2010, 2011; O'Brien 2007; David et al. 1993). Research has shown that engagement differs due to race, class and political ideology; for example, Rollock et al. found that black, middle-class parents engage fully with the education system, using a range of resources to help their children navigate through (Rollock et al. 2015). Other research shows that middle-class parents engage more than working class parents, leading to different outcomes for their children (Ball 2003). Engagement can also change depending on whether the child has special educational needs (SEN). Cole showed that parents of children with SEN might have to engage in the school choice process on a deeper and more challenging level in order to secure suitable schooling for their children – especially following the introduction of market mechanisms into education, where children with SEN are seen as less 'desirable' as they take up more resources (Cole 2005). Even with the administrative and emotional aspects that choice requires, parents do not have a guarantee that their choice will be granted; in fact, many parents and children experience disappointment when they do not get their first choice of school. For some

parts of England, those offered their top choice of school was 55% in 2015¹. The number of families not getting their first choice of school is likely to worsen as it is predicted that England's schools will need to provide 880,000 more places by 2023 (Ofsted Annual Report 2014). This shortage will result in a lack of places at the best schools and parents who are powerless to achieve a place at the school of their choice.

The increasing competition for school places, the growing number of school types in England and the sophisticated marketing taking place in schools, has led to an intensification of the school choice process, leading to increased parental engagement and investment by some groups. It is the aim of this research to understand the impact of the school choice process on the mothers of children undergoing the transition and the effects these policies might have on their thoughts and feelings about performing motherhood and the way this intersects with other areas of their lives.

Why Mothers And Not Parents?

For reasons that are outlined below, I have limited this research to mothers. Research shows that mothers do much of the 'legwork' for their children's education and in childrearing (David et al. 1993, 1994, 1997). Mother's part in the school choice process has been acknowledged in the literature (David et al. 1993, 1994, 1997, O'Brien 2005, 2007, Wilkins 2010, 2011). Mothers, therefore, experience the brunt of the practical and emotional aspects of the school choice process and are responsible for making sure that their children receive the very best education (Ball et al. 2004;

¹ The figure of 55% was recorded by the PAN London Admission Board for Secondary Schools in

David, West & Ribbens 1994; O'Brien 2007). Limiting the study to mothers seeks to represent that they are expected to be engaged in this process more than fathers and that the process is gendered. Furthermore, the use of the term 'parents' often hides the disproportionate amount of work undertaken by mothers in this part of family life; as women are still responsible for the physical and emotional health of children despite their other responsibilities in the family including paid work (Featherstone 2009, Gatrell 2005).

Research has shown that mothers' engagement with the process far surpasses the role that policy planned for and far exceeds that of a consumer choosing a product.²

Rational Choice Theory would presume that mothers, during the school choice process would undertake an identification of the options that are available to them and their children and then match their children to the most appropriate one available. However, research by O'Brien (2007) and Wilkins (2011) has shown the work done by mothers at this time as both 'intensive emotional, educational carework' and 'affective labour' respectively. This research shows that mothers are not only doing all of the logical tasks associated with choice (desk research, visiting schools, family discussions, etc.) but they are also emotionally involved in preparing themselves and their children for this transition. This preparation places a burden of time and energy on mothers and isolates the enormous amount of work that they put into the process, making them the largest actor, agent and stakeholder. Consequently, the role of a mother in the school choice process is not as simple as 'consumer' and has to be considered in a wider and deeper context.

² The school choice policies were designed to introduce a market into education, where parents would be able to choose the right school for their child. Thus, allowing the best schools to succeed and the worst schools to seek to improve (and, therefore, attract more students) or close. This would mimic the open market, as seen in retail or fast food.

The significant amount of time and energy that a mother puts into their children's education is a result of them being heavily invested in the child and their educational environment (O'Brien 2007). In turn, mothers inhabit discourses of caregiving and develop a sense of themselves in the way they perform motherhood and other aspects of their lives, at least partially, based on these relationships and tasks (Surry 1985). Consequently, when the rules surrounding the mother/child relationship change (for example, when the child makes the transition to secondary school), then it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between mother and child changes to reflect this new reality and, also the ways in which the mother performs motherhood. While there is little research looking at the changes mothers experience during the secondary school transition, some research does exist about the primary transition (Reynolds, Weissberg and Kaspro 1992; Dockett and Perry 2005a; Margetts 2002a; Wildenger et al. 2008; Sayers et al. 2012). When children leave the family home altogether– known as Empty Nest Syndrome, is also a studied phenomenon. (Sullivan 1998; Borland 1982; Myers and Raup 1989).

The Problem

There is little academic literature that addresses the transition to secondary school as a significant life change for the mother and the effects on the mother's internal narrative in the way that she performs motherhood. This research seeks to tackle the lack of literature on this subject and investigate how mothers engage with the process and the subsequent effects that this has.

My Background

My interest stems from my experiences as a mother going through the secondary school choice process with my own children. As a teacher, not only did I know the school transition was coming, I was immersed in it; I was advising other parents at open days, organising transition activities for students and helping those children to settle into a new environment, which, for many, was a challenging experience.

Although much of my professional part in the process made me aware of policies, procedures and practice, I was unprepared for the personal impact that preparing my children for secondary school would have. Making my children ready for other life events, such as going to primary school or travelling by aeroplane for the first time paled into insignificance with what I was being asked to do. I was not ready for my sons to grow up. I felt that society's arbitrary organisation of schooling was telling me to let go of those fragile infants I once held in my arms and prepare to let them grow into young adults – who, as a result, would no longer need me as much.

Two factors made this process harder than I could have imagined. I live in an area where secondary schools are below average (judged by the number of students achieving 5 A*-C grades at the end of KS4 and Ofsted school ratings), and I was battling the necessity of providing the children with the very best education and opportunities I could. Also, I had to balance the more practical factors like travel, logistical organisation and my other responsibilities as a wife, mother, student and employee. Secondly, I was overwhelmed by the different natures of my children – one flexible, bright and adaptable child, the other with more complex educational needs. I

was confronting choices that were framed in altered and disparate terms, which I considered in a negative and restrictive way.

Reflecting on my own performance of motherhood at this time has been an important part of the research process. My own performance of motherhood was conscious and something I did overtly, to be seen. I was mindful of the ideologies of the good mother and the ideal mother on a deep level, not through reading or teaching, but in a visceral way, where it seemed, at the time at least, to be the only way of acting. My performance included making sure that my children were clean, well dressed, rehearsed in potential interview questions and confident in the situations they were being exposed to. I did this to create a sense of respectability, which for me, seemed essential. This came mainly from a sense that being a full time working mother, who had other things to do, I was viewed as being in some ways inadequate – so I was seeking to persuade others that I was a competent and good mother. Due to working outside the home and often being away, I was precluded from some of the groups that mothers form around their children, almost the fellowship of good mothers, and my overt mothering sought to compensate for this and to show that I could be a good mother regardless of the other pressures and challenges in my life. These barriers were dismantled and overcome, often causing frustration and anxiety at this time. The public performance was something I thought everyone was watching and judging me on and caused occasional emotional reactions to the situations I was in.

This overt performance of motherhood, almost exclusively happening in the public domain crept into my private life. As I was actively embodying the narrative of the good mother, the values surrounding this became evident in my private sphere.

During this time it felt like the whole world was watching and this perceived surveillance exacerbated the moral imperative that I had to gain the very best education I could for my children. This does sound, in retrospect, like paranoia, however, although I am sure that people were not as engrossed in my actions and decisions as I thought they were, the judgment was real and at times openly voiced by the people around me.

I look back at my performance of motherhood at this time, which was aggravated by social policy, institutional practice and the communities I was part of. Essentially, I was performing motherhood not only at the intersection of consuming educational services but also within a whirlpool of other pressures, real or imagined from different angles.

At this time, I was reflecting on my own life, my performance of motherhood my place in society and also questioning the effect that government policy was having on my family and society in general. During the school choice process, I have fluctuated between being angry, confused, overwhelmed, proud and a whole host of other emotional states and thoughts about who and how I am. However, I have also been curious about the experiences of other mothers; had the process affected change on them, as it had on me? Also, did the educational system and local government understand the impact and importance of this process on the people undertaking it? Therefore, this research is built on experiences I have had as a mother in response to government policy and my desire to understand it in a wider societal context.

Aims Of The Research

The aim of this research was to investigate the performance of motherhood and its relationship to the school choice process during the transition of children to secondary school. The research argues that the transition from primary to secondary school is an important change in a mother and child's life and that this transition would affect the ways that motherhood was performed. The way in which the transition is carried out with such a large significance attached to its success in England raises the stakes for the mothers involved and would heighten its effects on them. The research explored the experiences of 15 mothers who had recently been through or were going through, the school choice process to secondary school. A qualitative approach was used to gather the mothers' stories in their own words. Focusing on the experiences of these mothers created a space where their individual stories, voices and understanding were accepted as legitimate and important.

Through a close feminist post-structural reading of mothers' experiences, it should be possible to understand and deconstruct the dominant discourses of motherhood and how these relate to the ways that mothers perceive themselves. It also helped to understand the negotiation of competing discourses that mothers inhabit during the school choice process and provides insight into explaining the difficulties with these in a way that structural theories are not able to.

Specifically, I aimed to:

- 1) Consider how mothers engaged with the school choice process, specifically how mothers connected with the process and procedures surrounding school choice and the transition development.
- 2) Explore the experience of change in mothers in relation to the school choice process and the transition of their children, in reference to how they perform motherhood.
- 3) Understand whether these experiences are shared between mothers.

It is necessary to clarify the three core concepts referred to in the research objectives.

Firstly, the **school choice process** is the procedure that parents of all 11-year-old primary school children go through in choosing a secondary school for their child. In some parts of England, the process happens twice; once from 11 years to middle school and then from 13 years to secondary school, while the process may also occur at different times for children who attend schools in the private sector. The process consists of many elements but has two core features: the administrative procedure in which parents fill in forms to indicate their choice of school and, secondly, the range of social, cultural and personal activities engaged in by parents and children to facilitate this process.

The second concept: **transition**, is defined as the change of school for the child. For the purpose of this research, transition refers to the whole range of processes, activities and experiences surrounding the child's movement from primary to secondary school. For some children and parents, the transition begins early and

continues long after the child starts secondary school, for others the process is short-lived.

The third concept is that of the **performance of motherhood**. For this research, the performance of motherhood is considered to be a performative identity – something which one ‘does’, rather than ‘is’. This is much in the sense of Butler’s (1990) theory of performative gender explored in chapter 2. I frame this as something which is done to be seen, a public performance.

Overview of Methodology

The study utilises a feminist post-structural approach and employed a qualitative approach to data collection, facilitated using narrative interviews with mothers. The method was chosen for its naturalistic and inclusive potential (Campbell and Wasco 2000; Cosgrove and McHugh 2000). A qualitative approach was thought the most suitable method to provide answers to the research objectives as it allows the richness of the women’s experiences to be captured (Denzin and Lincoln 2003) and legitimates their ‘voices as sources of knowledge’ (Campbell and Wasco 2000, pp. 783).

I conducted 13 individual and one joint interview with mothers (15 in total). The interviewees were all mothers of children who were currently going through the school choice process or had been through it in the last five years. The respondents were recruited from:

- 1) Three primary schools who sent a letter out to their year six (10–11-year-old) pupils addressed to their mother's.
- 2) Two secondary schools, which sent a letter to all mothers of children in years 7, 8 & 9 (children aged between 11 and 14).

The research was confined to a small rural area of East Anglia to ensure that the mothers and their children shared a similar environment and market forces when making choices.

Thesis Structure and Overview

This thesis presents the process, results and interpretations of the research. The present chapter has suggested the main themes and approaches that guided the research and has stated the aims that build upon each other to form an argument regarding mothers' experiences of school choice. The thesis is then divided into eight further chapters:

Chapter 2: Considers the theoretical framework of feminist post-structuralism, and how this framework drives the research construction and analysis.

Chapter 3: Reviews the specific literature regarding the Neoliberal reforms in education, which have led to school choice policies for parents for English secondary schools. It considers the current policy context, what is known about the experience of choice and whether choice is an achievable experience for parents.

Chapter 4: Explains how mothers are involved in the school choice process. It defines motherhood and looks at different ways of theorising motherhood, while also considering the performance of motherhood and how life transitions affect it.

Chapter 5: Discusses the design and methodology of the study. Firstly, the chapter examines qualitative research within the feminist post-structuralist position. It then considers narrative enquiry and interviews, followed by an explanation of the research design. This chapter also explores ethical issues and those of trust and validity. Finally, it explains the procedure undertaken for data analysis.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8: Discuss the analysis of findings, which are split into the three themes of space, relationships and emotions. The chapter on space/materialities looks at how a mother's experience of choice intersects with the more practical issues of space/materialities. The chapter on relationships outlines the mother's complex web of personal, professional and societal relationships and how they impact school choice. The emotions chapter explores the emotional responses that were the foundation for many mothers' stories.

Chapter 9: The thesis concludes by providing the main findings of the study, discussed in the light of the initial research aims. Limitations of the study and future directions for investigation are discussed here.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This research is theory driven. The theoretical framework has been selected because it connects my beliefs about the purposes and nature of the education system, society and knowledge with the ways in which I believe mothers engage with the school choice process and perform motherhood. The right theoretical framework can create an understanding of the situation in question (Silverman 2001, Creswell 2009).

Theoretical frameworks are used to drive research because they provide a useful lens through which to view how society operates, how institutions work and why people interact in the way they do. It can also help where things need to be understood on a deeper level; it can give direction where issues like gender, race, class and ethnicity are considered (Tavallaei and Abu Talib 2010, Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). For Creswell (2008) theory provides a way of explaining behaviours and standpoints, orientates research around particular concepts and as a lens through which to view the work and a framework for how to structure the research around interrelated concepts. In the case of this research, the theoretical framework has also informed the nature of the research objectives, data collection methods, analysis and guided data interpretation. Theory is woven throughout and indicates where the research comes from, where it is going and what it hopes to achieve. I hope that using this framework to guide the research promotes a rigorous, innovative and flexible exploration of the performance of motherhood during the school choice process

The framework that guides this research is feminist post-structuralism, which can be defined as

“... a mode of knowledge production which uses post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social procedures and institutions to understand existing power relationships and to identify areas and strategies for change”

(Weedon, 1997, p. 40-41).

A brief description of feminisms and post-structuralism precede an explanation of feminist post-structuralism and its core concepts, including identity and performativity as they apply to this research. The following chapters focus on the educational policy context and motherhood to conceptualise the ideas referred to in this thesis.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is the expansion of feminisms as a political movement into philosophical discourse. It is organised around the belief that the sexes should be equal: socially, politically and economically. It aims to analyse the status of women in society and use the knowledge gained to better women's lives, give them a voice and provides a range of perspectives on social, cultural and political phenomena.

Three Waves Of Feminism

Feminism developed in three waves, each with different features. The first wave of feminisms arose in the context of the newly emerging industrial society and liberal politics. It was concerned with equal rights, access and opportunities, but mainly women's suffrage. Although feminist writers are considered to have existed before this time (Hesse-Biber 2012), it was not until the late 19th century that the women's rights movement became visible as a clearly defined self-conscious movement. These activities stretched far and wide, breaking international and social barriers (Stanton 1902 in Adiletta 2005, Perkins 1998, Fuller 1845/1998).

The second wave of feminisms came in the 1960s and 1970s and provided a stark comparison to the ideals of domestic bliss in the post-war Western welfare societies portrayed by the media and the growing advertising industry. This wave was linked to the radical voices of women's empowerment and differential rights and grew alongside other oppressed groups (women of colour, lesbians, the working class woman, etc.) being defined at the time. The voice of the second wave was more radical and fused broader critiques of patriarchy with those of women's liberation. Sexuality was at the core of this wave, with sexual liberation coming from the development of contraception and women's rejection of the tools of female oppression. It drew on feminist scholars such as Betty Friednan's 'Feminine Mystique' and Juliet Mitchell's 'Women: The longest revolution' and claimed that the 'personal was political' (Hanisch 1970, Millet 1969, Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1978, Beal 1969).

The third and arguably current wave of feminisms began in the 1990s, although their very existence and structure are a matter of debate (Faludi 1995, Goldberg 2001, Dicker and Peipmeier 2003). This wave contains a generation of women who have never lived in a world without feminisms but also recognises many of the criticisms, launched against it. The focus is less about the political process and more to do with individual identities. The focus on identity reflects the recognition that first and second wave feminisms were dominated by white, middle-class women and failed to account for women of colour, different religions, nationalities, etc., and that a single identity of 'woman' is impossible and unhelpful. Instead, as the most individualistic and diverse wave of feminisms to date, it allows women to define feminisms and their place within it and determine what it can become.

Feminisms have been an influential force socially, academically and politically for many years, and while a thorough critique is outside the realms of this work, a few criticisms are important to note. The feminist call for female only spaces and consideration may encourage separatism rather than bring about social reform; this offers no solution to gender inequality and rather encourages resentment and derisive attitudes about feminisms and women as a group. Also, it raises an important point about identity and who identifies as a woman and what that means in practice (Hole and Levine 1971, MacKay 2015). Furthermore, the political constraints that feminisms place on the truth are restrictive (Gross and Levitt 1994, Haack 1993, Pinnick, Koertge & Almeder 2003). Things, which do not align with feminist thought, are often discarded, and anything to do with patriarchy or imperialist power rejected wholesale.

Lastly, feminisms have traditionally been a cause for the white, middle class, first world woman and have, at times, sidelined women of colour, lesbians, transgender and working class women. The exclusion of these groups has, in my opinion, led feminists to be disparate, fractured into sub-groups representing the various minorities who have been unaccounted for and develop different agendas. Feminism is therefore not a collaborative movement, but a set of groups moving in parallel, often along conflicting tracks (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004). One area where feminists depart from a more traditional path is with those who identify as post-structuralist.

Post-Structuralist Theory

Post-structuralism is a group of theories/theorists who are concerned with the relationship between human beings, the world and the practice of making and reproducing meaning (Belsey 2002, pg. 5). Post-structural ideas about language and representation have had a significant impact on the social sciences. Although it is one of the major driving forces in academic thought today, some theorists argue that there is no precise definition of post-structuralism and some scholars even deny association with the term. As a philosophical collection of ideas, it can trace its roots back to the 1950s and 1960s, especially in France, and is linked to the work of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Levi-Strauss.

Post-structuralism levies an attack on the hegemony of historical and philosophical traditions, especially those based on the ideas of the enlightenment. It opposes structuralism by moving beyond the analysis of phenomena as being part of a defined system and the assumption in structuralism of the methods of binary opposition and

the stability/validity of meaning. By doing so, it questions the very existence of truth, reality, meaning, sincerity, etc. It, therefore, rejects the concept of reality and takes as a basis that nothing is 'real', as everything is defined in terms of everything else and even then it is only relative and constructed. Foucault summed it up as such:

"... For the last ten or fifteen years, the immense and proliferating criticisability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses; a sort of general feeling that the ground was crumbling beneath our feet, especially in places where it seemed most familiar, most solid, and closest to us, to our bodies, to our everyday gestures. But alongside this crumbling and the astonishing efficacy of discontinuous, particular, and local critiques, the facts were also revealing something... beneath this whole thematic, through it and even within it, we have seen what might be called the insurrection of subjugated knowledge's."

–Foucault, Society Must be Defended, 7th January 1976/2003 pg. 6-7, tr. David Macey

Post-structuralism also rallies against the meta or grand narratives like Marxism and feminisms. Lyotard sees this as positive, as meta or grand narratives tend to dismiss the naturally occurring chaos and disorder that occurs in the universe, seeking to explain and define everything to a level of clarity (1979). He also states these meta or grand narratives tend to be created and reinforced by existing power structures, and are therefore untrustworthy. Lyotard (1984) claims a rejection of meta-narratives, which expresses an important hallmark of post-structuralist thought.

Although the post-structuralist movement is ongoing and diverse, an influential thinker has been Michel Foucault. Foucault, a 20th-century philosopher and historian, sought to investigate how contemporary society is structured differently from those that preceded it, to work out how this information could be utilised to solve some of the significant problems of contemporary society. Foucault's ideas about the operation of power is the channel through which most of his other major theoretical elements flow (Downing 2008). Foucault rejected the traditionally identified mechanisms of power and instead considered that power arises through the unexamined rules that govern society and social interaction, which then shape the bodies and minds of individuals within that society. He argued through a historical analysis of the criminal justice system, insanity and sexuality that people are controlled and transformed by disciplinary power which are the mechanisms of normalisation where individuals are moulded to conform by societal institutions. Foucault argued that the powers that were the dominant social, cultural, political and economic forces that control the pursuit of knowledge are sold to society as the 'truth'. They are, therefore, in control of what can and cannot be accepted as truth and falsehood and develop techniques and procedures to sanction, reward and determine what is the truth is and who is at liberty, to give a definitive version of it. Although truth cannot be separated from power, it can be liberated from the dominant forces by individuals willing to do so.

Foucault argued that traditional views of society ignored the basic power that these mechanisms have and that they were disguised by the institutions that grow up to surround and justify them. These mechanisms were seen by Foucault to be a deep set of rules which were embedded in our language; primarily cultural codes of

interpretation that he named discourse. With this, Foucault rejected the notion of rational knowledge, which produced objective accounts of reality and identified that these realities along with power can control and reduce the potential of human possibilities. The focus is on deconstructing these discourses (and the illusion of rational knowledge) and the power they have over individuals. Accordingly, disciplinary power and the discourses it operates within is dangerous because it is not recognised by those affected by it, who internalise it and are unable to recognise its force. However, Foucault did not position power as a negative force. He saw it as situated within webs where it flows within and between individuals at different points in time and although it is exercised upon the individual, they can also exercise it.

Arguing that discourse was the only reality has influenced me, as I believe that we operate (perform) through these dominant discourses or our rejection of these. Although we may be mindful of why we act, we are powerless in many ways to reject them or act differently. I find the power in Foucault's work the challenge it places on the basic assumptions of knowledge, truth, identity, society and power that we come to accept as individuals living in society. Challenging these basic assumptions provides me with power to think critically about how people perform.

Identity Theory And Post-Structuralism

To consider how women identify as mothers, transform and perform motherhood, it is necessary to contextualise the debates historically, albeit briefly, of how identity theory has evolved over time. I will argue that identity is performed and constructed

in an active way through discourse, and is always dynamically changing. The focus will firstly sit with gender identity, then move on to a discussion of how motherhood identity is developed and created along post-structural ideas and finally finish with a discussion of performativity.

Identity is an important point in the break between structural and post-structural theories. According to post-structuralism, the stable, unitary person is challenged and therefore identity is not something that is stable, rational or static (Davies 1989).

Individual identity, rather than being something that exists in a constant format, is comprised of several possible selves which are located within different discourses.

We often talk about people as possessing attributes: absolutes which exist somewhere inside them which we have labelled 'identity'. Identity is often represented as a fixed or stable entity, an inner essence that determines who the person is. The identity is something we seek – something we have been conditioned to go out, find and create – it is the search for our true identity, which is the holy grail of modern life. It is not, however, something that objectively exists to be found, despite societies current obsession with finding it. Jenkins (2000) comments that identity is a widely used word in contemporary society and is invoked in a multitude of contexts: political, citizenship, social position and status, lifestyle, personal individuation, etc. He argues that identity is called into question to be established every day and it is not routine or trivial – who we are matters enormously (Jenkins 2004 Pg. 3). Jenkins is saying that identity can only be understood as 'being' or 'becoming' and that it is never final or settled – a process of identification rather than identity per se (Jenkins 2004 Pg. 5). For Jenkins, identity is a social construction; however, Foucault saw its creation

through a different means. The absolute of identity is something, which Foucault also rejected; he said that the idea of a real identity was just a way of talking about the self – a discourse like any other. The concept of a fixed entity is not a real thing – according to Foucault, it is constituted within the discourses of disciplinary regimes and then repeated through technologies of the self (Redman 2000). Therefore, the concept of identity or ‘who I am’ will constantly shift and change as we gain access to different discourses and is negotiated and renegotiated in an on-going way. It, therefore, is a continually unfinished project (Britzman 2000; Davies 2000a; Evans 2002; Jackson 2004). Foucault sees the subject as constituted within the discursive practices. These discourses designate the forms, representations, codes, conventions, language, etc. which produced culturally, historically and socially located meanings. They are:

“Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern”

(Weedon, 1987, p. 108)

An infinite number of discourses exist at any one time, but they can be thought of as what is accepted as reality in any given society. Discourses are, by their nature, hierarchal, but the dominant discourses (such as gender, class, etc.) are reinforced by existing systems of law, education, media, etc. and there are punishments for rejecting or operating outside of these. Punishments are not limited to those provided by disciplinary law and include being rejected by one’s peer group, being demonised for having body modifications or not being able to gain access to paid employment, etc.

Acting within the dominant discourses (consciously or unconsciously) is a performance – so motherhood is also a performance of what we believe to be reality and truth, rather than an unfolding of biological urges or psychological intuition or sociological essence. Foucault initially saw subjects as constituted entirely through these discourses, but in his later work, he began to examine how through ‘technologies of the self’ individuals could transform and form themselves.

Foucault’s conception of identity is mitigated by the capacity to reject discourses, as he suggested that everyone had the ability to choose outside of the subject positions offered to them and therefore craft themselves in the spaces between discourses. Foucault called this process critique. By this, he means the development of a mindset and practice that gives us the ability to identify the status quo and have the freedom to question it. He argues that an individual can maintain mobility of mind and spirit by analysing the discourses of truth, power and subjectivity and thereby exposing alternatives to what currently exists. Changes to dominant discourse and the ability to act outside of them require the possession of a means of communication and self-representation, which is rarely available to those who lack power and can be flattened by the real penalties. However, Foucault maintained that change is possible, and freedom can be exerted over the forces of power.

Foucault’s approach provides an argument for the unstable and inconsistent nature of identity – if it is created through discourses, then it must be an act of performance through unique conditions and moments because this is always occurring. Foucault’s ideas on the self take the idea of identity as a form of oppression, a way of exercising power and preventing people moving outside of firm and fixed boundaries. His theory

that there was no autonomous self and no independent will that the self (or our expression of it) was produced via our interactions with the mechanisms of power which shape our body and minds –the discourses we move within. This power is expressed by identities being defined by the ruling classes to oppress certain groups in society (mentally ill, youth, homosexuals, criminals, etc.) and this power to define, limits people unless they resist and this constraint works in favour of the ruling classes.

Post-Structuralism And Gender Identity

Where Foucault's work is not precisely clear is gender. Explanations of identity have been traditionally androcentric or, at best, gender blind (Mansfield 2000). However, historically this can be related to women's positions, as they were subsumed into the man's identity upon marriage and, therefore, had little need to find their 'true self' (McDonaugh 2000). Haslanger (2000) contends that women still seem to understand self by their gender and social positions (class, race, etc.), but that self cannot be identified through gender alone (Hooks 2000). However, it would be difficult to develop a sense of how to perform as a mother, without first having developed some sense of performing as a woman. There are many theories to draw from here; I will concentrate on Judith Butler.

In 'Gender Trouble' (1990), Butler considers the mechanisms by which the social construction of identity occurs. It seems apt to bring a discussion of Butler's ideas in at this point as she spans post-structuralism and gender. Her ideas are important because she brings into question the naturalness of gender identity within culture and

examines the individual's constitution of him or herself as essential. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler rejects structuralist concepts of the self as an autonomous agent who carries out their actions and achieves self-determination. She argues that the self has no natural attributes, therefore denying that 'a priori' characteristics exist and define what it means to be human. She instead argues for a post-structural conception of the self where there is no subjectivity, only that which is constituted by the social and discursive relations of one's culture. By arguing this, she rejects any foundation that gender identity is determined by biological characteristics (although she does not dismiss the fact that two different body types occur and precede culture). Therefore, opening up discussion on the origins of sexual and gender identity as being socially/culturally constructed, positioning gender identity as being a performance with no underlying structure or essence. While Butler concedes that gender identity is not all about social conformity, she does claim that it is policed at a high level in society with failure to adapt to the social and cultural norms being isolating and sometimes fatal. Butler also claims that 'woman' as a category is dangerous and hides what is culturally and socially constructed, therefore confining all women to a particular idea of 'woman' which is both oppressive and misrepresentative, excluding many more people than it seeks to represent. This criticism of gender identity and 'woman' is a powerful critique of the ideas of the essential self and give us a more fluid framework within which to talk about the performance of identity and the way it operates societally.

Ideas contained within Butler's work change the focus on gender, from being something that exists as an identity to something that is performed. Butler explains that feminists rejected the view that one's biology was destiny. However, they then

developed a narrative of patriarchal culture, and that male and female identities must be built by culture and bodies, going on to make the same outcome almost inevitable, not leaving any room for choice or freedom in the development of gender, but closing the choices down. In doing this, Butler suggests that feminists grouped women together into collective identities with common characteristics, views, behaviours and interests, neglecting to understand that 'woman' and 'women' are fraught categories which are complicated by a variety of other factors such as ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc. This restriction reinforced the binary view of gender relations, which she challenges. Butler changes the focus to understanding gender as socially constituted and constructed, positioning gender as performance and able to shift in different directions at various times. Butler, therefore, sees gender as a process which has neither beginning nor end and that no identity exists beyond the acts that express it. For Butler, identity is performance; it is performed (using a series of associated behaviours, actions, language, etc.) in different ways and not universally something that you are - changing the argument from whether we do gender to how we do gender. She argues that, by framing identity as performative, equality for all is more likely to be achieved, and gender norms will be changed.

Performativity

Before moving on to consider an analysis of Butler's ideas, the nature of performativity as a theoretical concept as it applies to this work is briefly explored. Performativity as I apply it is conceptualised through the ideas of Butler. It is, therefore, an engagement with the embodiment and beliefs of the norms and practices within the dominant discourses in society. This embodiment takes the form of either

performing in a particular way to be perceived as being in a certain category (i.e. man/woman) or by subverting this category. These performances make it seem like these categories are essential, and something we are, or are not, giving rise to how identities are seen to be brought to life. It is the repetition or absence of this set of 'mundane and ritualised behaviours' (Butler 1988 pg. 526) with which everyone is familiar, that adds to the legitimisation of these categories. The familiarity referred to is the discourses that exist, constrain and regulate the behaviours and the ways in which we know how to reproduce them – they are, in essence, scripts that we repeat and rehearse. Examples include discourses of what it means to be a good mother or to be a single mother. Several of these discourses run through and intersect with us in our lives, and they dominate our performativity. A second overarching factor in performativity is its social nature. We are performing in social interactions with other people, which make it a social process – without other people, there would not be the need for the performance. Therefore, the ongoing construction of meaning through acts and gestures which occur through performativity creates a sense of illusion that essential categories and therefore identities exist. So the performance of gender, motherhood, consultant, father, etc. are the acts and behaviours (or absence of them) which are contained in the various discourses we all live in, rather than referring to an identity which actually exists. Performativity, as it applies to motherhood will be explored further in chapter 4.

Butler's perspective is not without its critics who suggest that her ideas are too theoretical and unable to be applied to everyday lives (Staal 2011). Butler is dismissive of this, classifying it as a problem experienced by those who have a stable gender identity. Although she explains that this is not an issue in society, society

should be mindful of the people for whom there is complication in stable gender identity and to not classify gender as homogenous. This is linked to a wider issue with post-structuralist theories, which is the loss of common groups and collective identities. Seeing everyone as an individual has its benefits. However, it denies a sense of common subordination and disadvantage of women around the world. It is fair to say that women will share some common ground and that this is a powerful base on which to build action and change – some of which may be lost in Butler's work. Although difficult to apply, Butler's work opens up new space, a field of possibilities, not only for women but also for all in which they are no longer dominated by the oppression of gender and, therefore, the expectations of it. The discussion now moves to the ideas of feminist post-structuralism as a movement after a brief discussion of the critiques of post-structuralism.

Critiques Of Post-Structuralism

Critics of the approach would say that in its radical, anti-essentialist, anti-foundationalist standpoint can be equated with a sense of indeterminacy that many find difficult to understand and apply. The ideas of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, etc. provide challenges to the reader, which leads many to retreat without a practical understanding of these ideas. Not only may readers not be able to engage with the ideas, they also provide a disturbing foundation that nothing is essential. By accepting that nothing is essential, we are throwing many of our beliefs as individuals into disarray, which can be accompanied by anxiety and a deeply worrying forecast for the future. Furthermore, because you need to be able to identify something before you seek to change or challenge it, make post-structuralism a difficult set of theoretical

concepts to apply. This inaccessibility, both on a psychological and theoretical level has led to a further criticism that it is too conceptual and therefore irrelevant on the ground for social and political struggles, and therefore post-structuralism has tended to operate on a theoretical level. One example of this is with gender. Post-structuralism is very persuasive in the exploration of gender and exposing the discourses that exist. However, it is less powerful in suggesting a way forward to change these discourses to achieve equality. Therefore, what sort of politics is possible with post-structural ideas is unclear. The nature of post-structuralism could mean that it is not progressive (Epstein 1995) and if no one can use it for furthering social and political purpose, it becomes unusable; as Deleuze comments:

"It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate"

(Deleuze 1988 Pg. 208).

Although some writers have framed the theories as toolkits (Dempsey and Rowe 2004), breaking them down into their constituent parts and making them more usable, the criticism stands. A related point is that many feminists see post-structuralism at odds with feminist politics (Brodribb 1993). There are those that argue that its lack of provision of a theory of power for women, rejection of normative concepts and views on power and knowledge are disempowering for women (Deveaux 1994) – although we shall move on below to how these perspectives are fused with the feminist post-structural approach.

The discussion above outlines two philosophical movements that can be combined into a coherent and powerful view of the world, and the approach, from which this research is delivered, namely feminist post-structuralism.

Feminist Post-Structuralism

Feminism, over the years, has fractured into several sub-categories which, although still hold women's rights and equality at their heart, are led by different underlying beliefs, feminist post-structuralism being one of them. Feminist post-structuralism has grown out of many of the criticisms of feminisms. Firstly, feminism has developed a meta-narrative or totalising discourse of what it means to be 'woman' and 'womanhood', and this meta-narrative is criticised by feminist post-structural theorists (Flax 1987; Fraser 1992; Kristeva 1981; Weedon 1987). It is argued that this meta-narrative of women has been built on the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual 'woman' and has largely ignored others. This is summarised by Fraser and Nicholson (1990) who say:

"In recent years, poor and working-class women, women of colour, and lesbians have finally won a wider hearing for their objections to feminist theories which fail to illuminate their lives and address their problems. They have exposed the earlier quasi-metanarratives, with their assumptions of universal female dependence and confinement to the domestic sphere, as false extrapolations from the experience of the white, middle-class, heterosexual women who dominated the beginnings of the second wave"

(Fraser and Nicholson 1990: p. 33).

Feminist post-structuralism, therefore, addresses the need to recognise the differences between and within women and also across different historical, cultural, economic, religious and sexual landscapes and is able more fully to give all women a voice (Luke 1992).

Another problem identified with feminisms is the existence of an essential, fixed and stable self that is unchanging and the use of a language that speaks about and defines women as a truth (Gavey 1989). The notion of a fixed, stable identity is questioned by feminist post-structuralism which sees all experiences as having no inherent meaning only that given by language. The focus on language is critical as feminist post-structuralism suggests that it has not been placed at the centre of things, whereas in fact, it should have been. Feminist post-structuralism suggests that language in the form of discourse is what structures our subject positions and, only by undertaking an analysis of these, are we able to understand how and what they are constructing. Revisiting the work of Foucault and Butler is important here as it underlines the concept of the non-essential self and I would argue that the dominant discourses in society create and structure the category of 'woman' to meet their own ends. Using feminist post-structuralism, we can begin to understand how 'women' operate through the discourses or indeed reject them in their performance of being mothers.

Arising from these criticisms of feminisms and creating a lens through which post-structuralism and feminisms are fused into a philosophical perspective, the approach can be seen as an understanding of the ways in which we have come to understand ourselves (Burr 1995, Razack 1995). With the process of placing meaning to

experience varying from individual to individual and from place to place, the concept of meaning is, therefore, fluid and is continuously being formed and reformed. The deconstructive nature of the perspective understands that a woman's lived experience is not rational, clear cut or heterogeneous.

Feminist post-structuralism is a relevant perspective to this research as it blends the idea of the female experience, power and identity, which are all critical to the exploration of the performance of motherhood in the school choice process. Also, it may uncover gendered discourses, structures and processes, which are embedded within the school choice process, and reflect the existence of underlying culturally conditioned structures (e.g. systems of knowledge, power relationships, identities) within which motherhood is located. As a position, it also recognises that gender is not the sole determinant of a woman's fate (Hill Collins 1990).

Central to the power of feminist post-structuralism is the way it conceptualises gender and puts it at the heart of research. The gender category 'woman' and within that 'mother' is omnipresent in most cultures as constructs. Not only are they there, representing some essentialist knowledge, but the individuals are defined by their belonging to this category whether it is relevant or not. It was Oakley (1972) who defined differences between 'sex' as something biological and gender as 'parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity' (pg. 13), therefore creating a distinction between the physiological state and the socially constructed one. Feminist post-structuralism recognises that everything that defines 'woman' is cultural and social. Grieshaber (2007) sees feminist post-structuralists as arguing against:

“an essentialized gendered way of knowing and argue instead that gender is discursively produced. Rather than one gender identity, individuals including teachers and children perform a number of gendered ways of knowing and being that depend on the social context and the meanings circulating within a set of social relationships”

(Grieshaber 2007 pg 7-8)

St Pierre (2000) has suggested that the category ‘woman’ holds many people who are assigned to it, and all of their other differences, such as race, class, and ethnicity, are subsumed within this single category of gender. This category, to be kept intact, has to be defined and we do this in the form of language, which privileges the search for identity (and within that categorisation) over difference. However, women’s and mothers’ identities are created through the intersection between categories (class, race, ethnicity, religion, etc.) (Crenshaw 1995), and gender does not rise above these other categories. Feminist post-structuralists have always been concerned that substantial differences can be erased through blanket assignment to these categories and that, once people are put into their pigeonhole, it can lead to manipulation, dismissal and oppression. Therefore, by upholding the values of post-structuralism as ‘heterogeneity, multiplicity and difference’, a singular gender identity or category does not fit into this (Flax 1990, pg. 188).

By taking this approach to gender and understanding that gender and other differences are created textually, one can begin to comprehend that identity is something that is ‘precarious, contradictory, in process and always reconstituted in discourse every time we think and speak’ (Weedon 1987, pg. 32). In understanding

the textual creation of gender, it becomes easier to understand the experiences of women and mothers and also the complexity and performance of lived experience.

Some of the major facets of feminist post-structuralism are dealt with in the next paragraphs. However, although these are themes that are seen to be universally important to the perspective, they are also areas, which are important for the research and, therefore, are not exhaustive.

Language

Language is a fundamental part of feminist post-structural theory. It is also the way in which we, as human beings, communicate with one another and construct an understanding of ourselves and others. It is principally the tool we use to provide meaning of the world around us and to construct our understanding of it. There are several ways in which language is particularly relevant to feminist post-structural theory. Firstly, it expresses and shapes our understanding of the world and, within that, it also creates a space for change (Davies 2000b). It is a device by which we can characterise and define internal structures and processes, as it is one of the only ways we can make explicit our inner thoughts (Arslanian-Engoren 2002). It is also the way in which we can explore social organisation, social meaning and power relationships (Weedon 1997).

‘Woman’ and ‘mother’ are performed and expressed through the language used and that which is used about them (Heslop 1997). For example, the word ‘mother’ can be deconstructed in different ways; it not only means different things to different people

but also is a concept related to time (a mother's role and identification is not the same in 2014 as it was in 1950), place and context. Language gives voice to women's experiences and is especially important where experience does not match the dominant discourse, because only through language can we come to understand women's lived experience. Feminist post-structuralists argue that language can limit women by framing their lives and over-determining their life paths. Weedon (1997) suggests that only through a feminist post-structural lens can the taken for granted aspects of language be challenged to de-legitimise the types of knowledge and experience that have come to dominate. Through deconstruction, feminist post-structural analysis can de-centre the subject and illuminate the relationship between language and power. It also considers how adhering to the dominant discourses determined by language doesn't allow for the understanding that women's experiences are unique and extraordinary.

It is relevant here to talk briefly about the methods used by feminist post-structuralists to investigate women's lives, as language is an important aspect in the selection of method. Feminist post-structuralists seek to find methods that capture the social and cultural influences on women's lives and try to identify methods that can make individuals reality known. Narrative inquiry is one such method and is understood to be a method, which is based on the stories that people tell about themselves and others, which allows for rich descriptions of experience, gives us the possibility to explore the meanings that participants derive from their experiences in the stories they tell and provides an opportunity to deconstruct language to explore meaning. It is a 'collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a piece or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus' (Clandinin and

Connelly 2000 pg. 20.). Narrative inquiry lends itself to feminist post-structuralism as it illuminates the linguistic and narrative structures of knowledge and it allows the researcher to listen through the story, to hear the experiences and identify the discourses, which shape it (Clandinin 2006). The use of narrative inquiry focuses on language as an important feature of narratives, not a transparent medium, which includes the analysis of its constituent features and gives researchers access to the perceptual and emotional experience of the participants by organising it through a story and allowing it to be told.

Careful consideration of the language used through a feminist post-structural lens will consider how motherhood within education is located, shaped and represented. It will also look at how the language that mothers use restricts the process of sense-making through the linguistic scaffolding they use (Sowell 2004, pg. 41). Also, it will also explore how mothers themselves maintain the dominant discourses, which may limit them through their use of language and how this can affect how motherhood is performed.

Discourse

Discourse is, according to Foucault (1972), anything that conveys meaning and is a way of talking and thinking about ourselves and society around us. It is a valid source of knowledge and experience and an important part of who we are. The centrality of discourse is critical, both to feminist post-structuralism and this research, as it structures the way we think about language and its use in the production of the world around us. Therefore, discourse can include language, stories, narratives and cultural

practices of the time and context that they reflect, but they are also subjective and have different meanings for those involved (Alsop, Fitzsimmons and Lennon 2002).

Asking questions about discourse is critical to feminist post-structuralists and questions such as 'how does it function', 'how does it exist' and 'what are its social effects' drives feminist post-structural explanations. Bove (1990) explains that discourse:

"provides a privileged entry into the post-structural mode of analysis because it is the organized and regulated, as well as the regulating and constituting, functions of language that it studies: its aim is to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought"

(Bove 1990, pp. 54–55).

Discourse is not just language. Neither is it only linguistic, as it organises the way in which we think and act in the world:

"discourse is not a language or a text but a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs."

(Scott 1988, pg. 35).

"It also enables us to understand how what is being said by people, the discourses they inhabit, fits into its own history and situations of being."

(Barrett 1991, pg. 126).

The flexible, subjective and interpretative nature of discourse means that both dominant and competing discourses exist. Foucault (1990/1976) considered that change in society is created through the shifting power relations of competing discourses. Once a discourse becomes dominant or typical; then it becomes difficult to act or think outside of this, and it makes sense to act/think only within the confines of the dominant discourse – which represents the control that the powerful in society have over us. However, Foucault suggested that resistance to a dominant discourse was possible through the analysis of discourses, which bring to light the taken for granted assumptions and understanding of how these oppress and control. Although I would concur with Foucault that resistance is possible, it is not an easy or indeed a possible route for many who lack power (especially women, minority groups, etc.). To resist a dominant discourse means to have the power and the resources to resist and to be heard to resist.

Through a close feminist post-structural reading of mothers' experiences, it will be possible to understand and deconstruct the dominant discourses of motherhood and how these relate to the way that mothers perceive themselves. It will also be able to understand the negotiation of competing discourses that mothers inhabit during the school choice process by being caught between 'good mother', 'strategic school chooser', and other competing discourses and provides insight into explaining the difficulties with these in a way that structural theories are not able to.

Power

A debated aspect of feminist post-structuralism is that of power, Foucault's analysis of power was that it was something productive rather than being universally repressive and something, which was inextricably linked with knowledge, therefore being mutually generative and inseparable. It was not something which could be:

“acquired, seized, shared or something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarianism and mobile relations’.” (Foucault 1978, pg. 94)

Foucault suggested that power was not a personal trait or something owned by an institution or position. Rather, it should be viewed as what occurs in complex strategic circumstances. Power manifests itself anywhere and is evident and exercised within everyday situations and discourses (Sowell 2004), and it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined (Weedon 1997). Foucault talks about power relations rather than power and asserts that power relations are everywhere, and we accept them because they are supported by knowledge and practices that are accepted by society. This view of power in society and power relations is particularly useful for feminist post-structuralists, therefore conceptualising power in this way is productive for analysis.

Feminist post-structuralism is active in exploring how discourse and power reinforce and normalise certain knowledge and truth about individual groups (such as women are weak and not effective leaders, women are nurturing and kind). These 'regimes of

truth' are effective in subjugating women and other marginalised groups (St Pierre 2000, pg. 499). These normalised truths can result in dominant discourses and practices which block the relations of power at a personal and institutional level and produce 'normative' notions of groups (such as women or mothers). This view of power within discourse is useful as it should help this research understand where power is placed in the mother's stories and how the dominant discourses of motherhood performance at transition are understood by mothers.

Summary

The concepts discussed above form the foundations of my ideas about the performance of motherhood and the challenges that childhood transitions place on it.

This research, undertaken using the feminist post-structuralist lens, is committed to producing and adding to knowledge that impacts mothers in society and the way they interact with the educational market. Using this perspective should allow the exploration of mothers' stories within the gender, socio-cultural, political and economic discourses, of which women inhabit. Conducting research from this approach has power in increasing awareness of the ways in which motherhood is performed and transformed via engagement with the routine primary to secondary transition of their children, and will be grounded in the knowledge development of mothers' roles in society as a whole.

The choice of perspective is justified in the necessity to capture specific elements of mothers' engagement with the school choice process as inseparable and as a function

of the context in which it is located. The perspective has guided the reading of the literature, data collection, research methodology, interpretation and ethical considerations. It has also acted as a guide to reflection in how my values, beliefs and experiences affect the choices I have made about the research process.

Chapter 3:

Educational Policy And School Choice

Introduction

In this chapter, I critically review the literature relating to school choice policies in the English education system, with a focus on Neoliberal reforms. Neoliberalism is a set of economic policies and ideologies, which promote rational, self-interest and beliefs that the free market should shape society. Neoliberal policies include aspects of privatisation, deregulation, rule of the free market, etc. I begin by considering an overview of the historical basis of the Neoliberal reforms in education, along with a brief look at educational policy between 1944 and 2014 to provide a wider context. I then look at what Neoliberal reforms were introduced, what they aimed to achieve and a critique of these. Consideration of the current state of affairs regarding school choice policy in the English system follows. There is then an assessment of what we know about the experience of school choice and whether it exists in reality.

Throughout this chapter, I will argue that school choice, although created as a universal policy to improve all schools and benefit all children, has created a system which is unequal and illusory for many, with some groups being more able to choose than others. I will also argue that organising education around market principles is an ineffective way to run a public service due to the limits on the way that education behaves like an organism and has, therefore, resulted in choice being a restricted experience.

Historical Basis Of Neoliberal Reforms In Education In The UK

Education has always been a challenging brief in British politics, and this challenge is something, which is echoed around the world.³ State education and especially compulsory state education became a major political issue in the second half of the 19th century. Mills (1956) interpreted the widespread introduction of compulsory education as a form of social control, ensuring stability and order through conformity. Marxists such as Althusser (1971) argued that it was not just social control that benefited from compulsory education. The progression of the capitalist society relied on the reproduction of a hard working workforce, accepting of their position and school provides the ideal training ground for this. It was recognised that England also needed a more advanced and widespread compulsory education system to educate society so that it could compete with the rest of the world. To society, social reformers and the government, funded state education for the people was looking both necessary and viable, and although the reasons for its introduction are complex, its economic functions are notable. State-funded, compulsory education in England became widespread from the 19th century (the 1870 Education Act) and was controlled by politicians to guarantee the continuation of their ideas, thoughts and practices which suited them best.

Consciously and in pursuit of competitive advantage, successive governments, regardless of their political ideology, have applied the maxim of change to the

³ There have been 9 Secretary of state for Education in the last 14 years and 34 acts relating to education.

educational system, ensuring that things rarely continue untouched for long (see Table 3.1). Many significant changes in the system have occurred alongside the general Neoliberal shift in social, economic and political policies. The implementation of these has led to changes in the education system and the ways that children, parents, teachers and the community interact with them.

Neoliberal beliefs in education

The Neoliberalist theory of political economy holds that the needs of the individual are best served by their liberation and the activation of their entrepreneurial freedoms, where market-based solutions founded on individual choices are favoured over those provided by government (Harvey 2005, p. 2). Neoliberalism, used as guidance for social policy, reframes societal relations regarding the market and characterises public services along the client-provider route, which then reduces the responsibilities of government to keeping people safe and governing the rules of the market.⁴

Neoliberal reforms gained pace in the 1980s with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party taking the lead. They emphasised the positive social and economic impact that market mechanisms could play in the public sector, especially education, and undertook to pass measures in schools in England which were critiqued for being inefficient bureaucracies and unresponsive to the communities they served

⁴ An example is the 2010 Academies Act, which introduced the ability of groups of individuals, churches, businesses, etc., the ability to set up a state-funded school, which is flexible in curriculum, policies and practice. In turn reducing the government's responsibility to funding and inspection.

(Robertson 2000)⁵. Part of the momentum for the redefinition of educational objectives took shape in Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin speech, in which he made clear to the voting public that the progressive pedagogical practices teachers used, criticised through the series of Black Papers (Cox and Dyson 1969a, 1969b, 1970), had not persuaded anyone of their validity and teachers needed to be guided on what and how to teach children by those in power and not the other way around. In addition, Stuart Sexton's contribution to the Black Papers, 'The Evolution of Choice', laid out a new foundation for the education system based on absolute freedom of choice by application (cited in Jones 2003). These ideas in combination grew in the 1980s and culminated in a piece of legislation that was so fundamental that it changed the educational landscape, as well as the way in which England's schools would operate. It is important here to explore briefly why school choice had to be a central tenet in the introduction of Neoliberalist policies in education. School choice is the factor upon which all the other policy effects depend: without choice there is no effective competition between schools to improve the outcomes of the education they offer, there is no incentive to make parents morally responsible for the choices they make for their children, there is no standardised system of examinations to hold teachers accountable and sort young people into their future societal roles. But more importantly, without school choice, there would be no progress in the growth of national economic competitiveness – which benefits a minority under the guise of improvement for all. This suited the governments aims for education and society.

⁵ There was widespread criticism of schooling in the Black Papers, published by right-wing academics between 1969 and 1977. They were critical of the implementation of progressive education, lack of discipline in schools and comprehensivisation preventing academic students achieving success. There were also some notable and highly publicised school failures, such as the William Tynedale affair, where the staff had tried to redevelop the curriculum and practice along the lines of romantic liberalism, but this had led to clashes amongst staff and school managers and the loss of control of students.

Summary Of Educational Policy 1944-2014

There has been a significant amount of legislation passed that affects education. The table below represents a summary of relevant legislation between 1944 and 2014.

Table 3.1: List Of Important Educational Legislation From 1944-2014

Year	Name	Major Provisions
1944	Education Act (Butler Act)	Created the tripartite system of education with a hierarchy of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools. Including admission by selection depending on the 11+ examination.
1946	Education Act	Provided for the enlargement and maintenance of voluntary schools and followed later that year by the Free Milk Act. ⁶
1948	Local Government Act	Enacted new rules for the funding of schools.
1959	Education Act	Enlarged the power of the state to give funding to aided schools.
1962	Education Act	Provided a legal basis that parents had the responsibility to provide an education for their children, providing for prosecution if they did not. Made LEAs responsible for funding for their students at university.
1963	Remuneration of Teachers Act	Gave the Secretary of State for Education the right to determine teachers' pay and conditions.

⁶ The Free Milk Act of 1946 was passed by the first woman Secretary of State for Education, Ellen Wilkinson, who was committed to the belief that there was a significant relationship between nutrition in poorer children and their performance at school. It was to become one of the most iconic moves in political history when Margaret Thatcher ('Milk Snatcher') removed milk provision.

1964	Education Act (Boyle Act)	Provision to raise the school leaving age to 16 and introduced the CSE qualification. ⁷
1968	Education Act	Provision for the change in size, character or situation of schools and placed age restriction on school attendance at different types of schools.
1975	Education Act	Amended the law for grants given by the local authority and increased government funding for special schools and special agreement schools. ⁸
1976	Education Act	Gave provision for comprehensive education to be introduced to England, repealing the current selective system
1979	Education Act	Repealed the earlier provision made in 1976 for the comprehensivisation of schools. ⁹
1980	Education Act	Provision for the assisted places scheme, ¹⁰ more power for parents over admissions and removed the responsibility of the LEA to provide free school meals and milk.
1981	Education Act	Based on the Warnock report and gave provision for students with Special Educational Needs.
1986	Education Act	Laid down rules on admissions, funding and information. This was the year that GCSEs were introduced.
1988	Education Reform Act	Laid down rules on parental choice in school admissions,

⁷ Before the 1964 Education Act, children who attended secondary modern or technical schools did not necessarily get access to GCE O-level qualifications as schools did not have to provide them. Many children attending these schools, could leave without any qualifications.

⁸ 1975 was the year that provision was also made making LEAs responsible for the education of mentally handicapped children, sexual discrimination was rendered unlawful and there were changes to family allowance (changing it to child benefit), all of which affected schools.

⁹ This legislation, introduced very rapidly after a Conservative government came to power with Margaret Thatcher at the helm, showed the Conservatives' distaste of Labour's equality aims and quickly ensured that selective schooling could continue.

¹⁰ A scheme introduced to help more able pupils attain a LEA funded place at independent schools. By 1997, over 80,000 children had benefited from this scheme and it had cost the government over £800million.

		establishing a national curriculum, statutory testing of children and Local Management of Schools.
1992	Education Act	Established Ofsted as an inspector of schools to inspect, write reports and grade all schools in England. ¹¹
1993	Education Act	Changed the way that schools were funded, set out what was to happen to schools identified as failing by Ofsted and further removed the powers of the LEA.
1994	Education Act	Introduced the Teacher Training Agency and provided for in-service training for employed teachers. ¹²
1996	Education Act	Changes to the way schools were inspected were introduced and made less bureaucratic. ¹³
1997	Education (Schools) Act	Provision for more selection in schools, gave Ofsted the power to inspect LEAs, expanded the Assisted Places Scheme into Prep schools and established the QCA to oversee qualifications.
1998	School Standards and Framework Act	Reduced the maximum class size for infants to 30, gave the government the power to take over failing LEAs and close failing schools, ratified the existing selection systems for schools, removed the Assisted Places Scheme and introduced Education Action Zones. ¹⁴
2001	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act	Legislated to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability in education.
2002	Education Act	A wide-ranging act, the main purpose of which was to legislate for the creation and maintenance of academies

¹¹ An act that underlines the Conservatives' commitment to Neoliberal policies in education. Removing inspection from HMI and basically creating teams of inspectors who bid for contracts to inspect schools opened up what was a very closed system to something more commercial.

¹² This act was widely accepted as threatening universities on their monopoly of teacher training and was, some believe, motivated by the Government's distrust of the teaching profession in general.

¹³ Designed to rectify some problems with the inspection system, which acutely affected teachers.

¹⁴ This legislation was based on the White Paper 'Excellence in Schools', which was commissioned by the Labour government and aimed to put education at the heart of society.

		and provide for their independence.
2005	Education Act	Simplified the process of school inspections, changed the Teacher Training Agency to become the Training and Development Agency for Schools and set out rules for schools going into Special measures and what actions should occur.
2008	Education and Skills Act	Provided for the age of compulsory education to end at 18 and ended the compulsory testing at the end of KS3.
2010	Academies Act	Expanded the Academies programme to include the situation where schools can be turned into academies by force.
2011	Education Act	Changed the regulation of qualifications, made some changes to the administration of academies, provided new post-16 education, including vocational apprenticeships, and raised tuition fees in HE to up to £9,000 per year.

The Educational Reform Act 1988 is still considered to be the single most important piece of legislation since the 1944 Butler Act (Maclure 1988). Although the aim of Thatcher's leadership was to remove the state from people's lives, this act tightened the grip of central government over teachers, schools, children and parents. It managed to legislate to direct education from the centre (through the National Curriculum and Ofsted) and incorporate a sense of Market Liberalism (Whitty and Power 2000, Mackenzie 1993). The legislation was designed to rectify some of the issues raised by the Black Papers and also to reframe parents as the 'proxy' choosers of their child's education, giving them new rights to choose which primary and secondary school their child attended and made them responsible for these (Baldock

1998; Le Grand 1997). These reforms argued that in education, consumer choice and competition would lead to more effective and efficient schools. Decades later, the Neoliberal changes made under this and subsequent legislation have become globalised 'like continental drift' (Bourdieu 1998: pg.1) and have transformed the narratives surrounding education.

What Neoliberal reforms were introduced and why

In the years leading up to 1988, the ground was prepared slowly for these changes through the Education Acts of 1980 and 1986 (see Table 3.1). Although various Neoliberal reforms were made to the education system before 1988, these only reflected what was going on in society, Neoliberal ideas are and were part of modern economic practice, being so embedded in the consciousness of society that it is hard to disentangle them from common sense. These reforms did not represent revolution but unstoppable evolution. In 1981, Keith Joseph, a life-long advocate of free market ideas, became Education Secretary, which signalled Thatcher's prioritisation of Neoliberal reforms in education. Thatcher's government was aiming to take back control of education on three fronts: the curriculum, the teachers and the local education authorities. Sold to the British public as legislation which would give power back to schools and parents, the 1988 ERA created hundreds of new powers for the Secretary of State at the time, Kenneth Baker, and turned education into a market. The misrepresentation of the bill was an underhand sales pitch by the government to the British people, promising to give them something they needed, while at all times making sure that they, the government, were in control of it (Johnson and Mansell

2014, Taylor, Fitz and Gorard 2001). I believe that the 1988 ERA led to distrust in the education system, which defines much of society's continuing relationship with schools and the education system today.

The 1988 Education Reform Act had several powers. Firstly, it created the National Curriculum, a foundation curriculum to be taught in all maintained schools in England and Wales. The national curriculum championed traditional subjects and British cultural heritage over the prevalent multiculturalism, which many were unimpressed with.¹⁵ It set out basic standards that children would achieve at the end of each educational stage and homogenised the knowledge, skills and understanding that children were to have. Within this were rules on religious studies, which stated that every day had to start with collective worship that was 'broadly of a Christian nature' (HMSO 1988). The National Curriculum reduced the freedom and function of teachers as the curriculum, now being set centrally, left the hands of the teachers and was developed by central bodies (Le Grand 1997, Neave 1988). The National Curriculum changed the function of teachers from curriculum innovator to deliverer and began a wave of measures which de-professionalised teachers as a group. Whatever your political view, the deprofessionalisation of teachers should be of concern, and I believe that the vocation of teaching was radically undermined by this legislation and has continued to be eroded in the decades that followed. This is an unwise way to treat the people who are responsible, for not only the education of our children but also indirectly our global and economic future. Under the act, schools also gained more power over their financial status under something that later became known as LMS

¹⁵ The act was criticised by many as being Eurocentric, Anglocentric and Monocultural. There were also concerns that both the music and history curriculum did not include reference to multicultural elements and the act of Christian worship, which schools had to factor into their days, had to be 'broadly Christian' (Drury 1988).

(Local Management of Schools). Schools were to be funded on a formula that depended on the number of students they attracted; along with this, the responsibility of employment of staff was transferred to the schools' governing body.

The option for parents to choose their child's primary and secondary school through open enrollment was a significant change introduced by the act. Which meant that parents were able to express a preference for the schools that they wanted their children to attend regardless of catchment area, local authority or status. The choices that parents made were to be informed by school league tables, enabled by a system of national testing at 7, 11 and 14, alongside the results of standardised public examinations, published and tabulated so that easy comparisons could be made. Parents could then 'vote with their children's feet' (Chubb and Moe 1988, pp.67) as the good schools would be chosen and thrive and bad schools would eventually suffer a low roll and fail to survive. This introduced competition between schools to improve student numbers, which would attract more funding, which could then be used to improve school resources - a win-win situation for good schools.

The reforms introduced by the 1988 ERA, and then strengthened by other policy, were designed to implement Thatcher's dual aims of converting the nation's schools into a market and start a transfer of power from local authorities back to central government. However, they went further than that in their effects on the UK education system and the structure of society.

Critiques Of Neoliberal Reforms In Education

I would argue that the market-style organisation of education is not appropriate to create the efficiency and effectiveness being sought as it lacks the necessary dynamics of other business and public sector organisations that make it impossible to bring under direct market control (Belfield and Levin 2005, Harvey 2005).¹⁶ In education, the Neoliberal reforms have created a quasi-market rather than an open one (Le Grand 1991, Sims 2012), which is limited by its organisation and structure. It is the essential lack of freedom to act, either as a consumer or a provider, in educational markets, which leave it open to harsh criticism of the effects of the Neoliberal reforms.

One consistent finding of Neoliberal reforms is the increased inequality created within these market systems (Harvey 2005, Hill 2006). Markets in education have an essentially stratifying effect (Hatcher 1998a). Schools can become segregated along class, race and socio-economic lines. This segregation is due to the inherent bias within Neoliberal policy towards those with the privilege to make choices, but also because Neoliberal policies are ideological in their nature and create markets that don't work in practice. The resources that enable choice are limited and unequally distributed in society, meaning: 'those endowed with material and cultural capital will only add to their existing advantages through choice policies' (Waslander and Thrupp 1995, p. 21) and those who lack the resources will suffer further.

Gewirtz et al. (1995) argues that, in England, these advantages over choice have led to

¹⁶ Schools and education in general cannot operate in the same way as an open market because: they have little control over the amount of funding they achieve, they have no control over revenue growth or ability to expand to meet demand, they have very little freedom to diversify to provide for different consumer needs and they do not operate for profit, because they have a guaranteed market share (MacDonald et al 2006).

the middle class, defined as those who are well educated with strong social contacts and a strong financial position (Savage et al. 2013), already inclined towards choice, becoming engaged consumers (with providers willing to cater for them). Leaving those who lack the necessary resources and who fail to imitate the middle-class way (Exley 2012b) pathologised as feckless or uncaring for failing to do their duty as good parents. Gewirtz (2001) coined the term 'responsibilisation' to describe the attempts of the state to transform the parenting behaviour of the working classes.

Responsibilisation is a type of disciplinary effort to normalise middle-class behaviour and encourage the working classes to act in the 'right' way. Olmedo and Wilkins (2016) describe how this operates by getting all parents to adopt and internalise responsibility for the risks inherent in the educational markets – they do this by encouraging anxiety, apprehension and concern about the choices available to them to get them to engage. This process results in working class parents becoming responsible for the problems created by the market and promotes inequality as being created by moral and cultural disregard rather than structural unfairness. Research on the middle classes benefiting from Neoliberal school choice policies is consistent (Ball 2002, Exley 2013, Burgess et al. 2014). I would argue that the creation of an unequal education system and a society stratified along class, racial and socio-economic lines is at the root of many problems endemic in society in general. Education is a universal system, designed to cater equally for all, but essentially discriminating purposefully against many, resulting in a tier of society unable to access good-quality state education and, therefore, further opportunities in life.

Choice policies can also have an effect on the inclusion of human difference in schools. The inclusion of disability and diversity in schools can affect profitability by requiring

additional resources and, therefore, schools can become exclusively for those who do not need this additional support. This means that those with additional needs cannot be adequately served by the current school system and find themselves sidelined or unable to access the support they need. Also, the inability to cater for such students reduces the natural diversity in schools, making them a less rich environment and training for inclusion in society. Schools can also become segregated along racial lines: firstly because of the structural constraints on many ethnic minority groups living in economically deprived areas and, secondly, due to a white middle class flight from the schools that ethnic minority children attend (Taylor et al. 2005; Bagley 1996; Coldron et al. 2010; Butler and Hamnett 2010). Therefore, the effect of diversity upon profitability means that the market organisation will not sit well with human difference and that is something that society has a significant amount of (Dudley-Marling and Baker 2012) and, I would argue, leaves schools failing to provide education for all or an inclusive experience.

Neoliberalism, therefore, promotes a kind of extreme individualism (Apple 2000), where notions of community and social solidarity are discarded for personal gain. This affects the fabric of collective life itself as the policies have a universal idea of a homogenous parent, with no consideration of the culturally specific nature of its application or its negative impacts on socially vulnerable groups. As the government starts to take their hands off, they start to govern society through the 'responsibilities and educated anxieties of aspirations of individuals and families' (Rose 1999, pg. 88). When society stops functioning as a holistic being and starts to operate as a mass of individual wants and desires, it creates a situation where only those with the

resources thrive. While this might be in favour of a small group of the rich elite, societies cannot continue to function in this way.

Another criticism of Neoliberal policies is the way they have redefined education in England regarding the contribution that they can make to the economy. As Blackmore states:

“Education has, in most instances, been reshaped to become the arm of national economic policy, defined both as the problem (in failing to provide a multi-skilled flexible workforce) and the solution by upgrading skills and creating a source of national export earnings.”

(Blackmore 2000, 134)

I would argue that education is, therefore, seen as the potential solution to all society's possible problems. This is represented in the views of progressive education as school is considered a place to challenge and change society. Examples include Freire's (1980) 'Pedagogy of the oppressed', which challenged official/traditional pedagogy as being oppressive to society and suggested that changing the way in which education is viewed as a vehicle for freedom and change. In addition, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggest that traditional pedagogy reproduces domination by the bourgeoisie. However, there is a difference between challenging traditional education for the good of society and changing it for financial profit or to suit personal philosophy. The latter is toxic, as it means that there is a constant mantra of change within the system to deal with the increasing problems of society and, therefore, other more problematic structures evade attention or reform and gives rise to a situation where education can be changed for any reason with the weakest justification.

The 1988 ERA introduced a system of standardised assessment tests at 7, 11, and 14, and the creation of Ofsted: the body, which inspects and reports on the quality of schools and the publication of national school performance data. All of these measurement strategies were created so that parents could be active, engaged consumers of their child's education and have real data with which to support their choices. Measurement is where the marketisation of education began, fundamentally using the mechanism of parents choosing schools freely based on published national information¹⁷ as a method of school improvements: those schools who were good and could prove they were, would attract more students, more funding and continue to thrive. Those schools which were judged as not so good by parents, Ofsted and the publication of league table data, would fail to attract students and funding and either be forced to improve to survive or go under. The choice process system relies on the assumption that the parents who are choosing the schools can and will act rationally. It is not always possible to act entirely on an evidence-based rational arguments and, therefore, those unable to do so may miss out on opportunities for their children. But, more than this, being unable or unwilling to act in this way is seen as some kind of failing and something to be derided (Frank 2000, Fitz, Taylor and Gorard 2002). I consider that this is an unacceptable way to frame parenthood and something, which has added to the problems for many people in gaining a good education.

Linked to this argument is how the market orientation changes the fundamental human right of a good education into an object of consumption, meaning that parents

¹⁷ Although league table data was used by 70% of parents going through the school choice process (Taylor 2002; Gorard 1996), many found the information provided difficult to access and interpret (Foxman 1997; Ball et al 1996; Burgess and Briggs 2006).

have to carry out 'affective labour including the utility of emotion and feeling for the purposes of maximising familial advantage' (Wilkins 2014, p. 266). This places an emotional obligation on the parent as chooser to make the right choice in order to gain the reward of a good education. To ignore this process is a fundamental transgression of parental duties, especially in the middle classes and, to not do so, one runs the risk of being demonised as not wanting the best for your child. Therefore, a pervasive criticism of these reforms includes the societal and individual judgments that are made on parents about the way in which they engage and carry out their duties and reduces cohesion in communities by creating good and bad behaviours.

Another effect of Neoliberalist policies is the professional reorientation of educational management and the cultural transformation that has occurred from schools becoming places of learning to businesses.¹⁸ This professional realignment was acutely visible after the 1988 ERA, but only made obvious what good schools did well – they achieved good grades, managed their budgets and achieved customer engagement & satisfaction. Although historically, this might have been a natural part of good schooling, it was brought to the public's attention by the Neoliberal reforms of the 1988 ERA and redefined what schools were meant to do and how they were supposed to do it. It may be argued that the interests of business have been allowed to pervade all areas of education – through managerial control systems, performance-related pay, school takeovers, the academisation programme, etc. – while the inherent individual greed and striving for profits have accompanied it (Cranston 2013, Ball

¹⁸ The transfer of business ideologies from the private to the public sector coincided with the Neoliberalist policies being introduced. The growing autonomy of schools to manage their own budgets, the rise in head teacher pay, business models of organisation and accountability being applied, performance-related pay for teachers and the freedom for large chains of academies and free schools to open, have all added to the growing business-like approach in education.

2013). I don't agree that this is a positive move in education and that it fundamentally undermines the educational voice:

"Too many of the school administrators I have met like to think of themselves as managers or chief executive officers, and their personal models are successful business leaders in the nation. So they feel at ease among the business community and seem to have lost their voice as educators. Without remembering who they speak for they are in danger of becoming pawns of the business community."

(Berliner 1997, p. 14)

The professional re-orientation and loss of voice referred to by Berliner has not been universally successful. The Education Funding Agency has investigated financial mismanagement in several schools over the last two years, where the use of public money has been brought under the spotlight, and many schools have been found to be lacking in this area. Although this could be interpreted as teething troubles for some as they come to terms with a business orientation, devolving power to the schools who sometimes have neither the time nor the expertise to undertake these duties adequately can be considered a problem with the continuing Neoliberal reforms. Further to this, the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, stated in 2014 that she did not rule out state schools being run as profit-making organisations. With that singular statement, the transition of state schools from public establishments into full-blown profit-making businesses is nearly complete.

The Neoliberal reforms were also successful in creating a system of selection for education. The Conservative government were unable to reintroduce selection into

schooling in 1979 and, therefore, worked to create a system whereby selection could be achieved via different mechanisms. By introducing devices such as local markets, open admission, etc., they were able to produce selection 'by the back door'. As a result, they could give the middle classes, even more, opportunity over others and create more inequality in schools and, therefore, society, thus serving their political ideologies (West and Noden 2003, Burgess et al. 2009).¹⁹

I would not claim that Neoliberalist policies do not have any place in the education market. In fact, for some groups, and in some geographical locations, they provide balance and benefit. However, Neoliberalism, as applied in the way that it has been in English law, has led to the realisation of some of the negative elements noted above. While some of these points are theoretical in their evaluations, others have an impact on individual lives. The next section will consider what the current system looks like and how people can expect to experience it.

The Current State Of Affairs In The English School Choice System: The Policy Context

Currently, in England and Wales, parents have the right to express a preference for the secondary school that they want their child to attend. They can pick their preferred schools from any county or status. If the school has enough places for all the children

¹⁹ Selection had been a part of education in England since its early days. Distinct efforts to ensure selection, such as the tripartite system, the variety of independent schools and the Assisted Places scheme, aimed to entrench selection even further. It was noted in a report in 1989, which evaluated the Assisted Places scheme, that only 10% of places went to those families it was actually designed to help, such as those with fathers who undertook manual work, those with unemployed parents, black or Asian communities. Therefore, it ensured that the middle classes were able to utilise even this selective scheme to their advantage.

that have applied, then they are bound by law to take those children (all except Grammar schools, which are academically selective²⁰). However, where there are more applications than there are places, the local authority makes the decision about which children are admitted to the school based on the school's over-subscription criteria in accordance with the school admissions code.²¹ The over-subscriptions criteria will differ from school to school; however, they often include factors such as statement of special educational needs, looked-after children and distance from school. These over-subscription criteria are frequently used to decide which child gets a place. Recent reports (Lloyds Bank 2014) suggest that the average house price near a good state school can be up to £21,000 higher than those near average or lower-achieving schools because of the factors such as distance to school being used for over-subscription decision purposes.

For the 530,000 children who entered school in September 2014, the number who got their first choice school was 70%, which dropped to 60% in London. The statistics vary nationally, but in larger metropolitan areas those missing out on their first choice of school rises. These low percentages are due to the large number of children who live in metropolitan areas competing for places at the best schools that are local to them. There are enough school places to go around. However, large numbers of people

²⁰ The 164 Grammar schools remaining in England are all fully selective and use the 11+ examination (or an equivalent) to determine their intake. All of these schools take the highest-scoring candidates on the test and are oversubscribed.

²¹ There are two types of admission information; the first is the school admissions code, which lays down the legal requirements that schools and local authorities must follow in order to ensure fair, clear and objective admissions. The second is the admission arrangements put into force by individual schools and include criteria, which relates to oversubscription.

compete for the relatively few places at the best schools. The number getting their first choice dropped from an overall 83% nationally in 2010.²²

There are many explanations for why fewer families may be receiving their first choice offer: a rise in birth rates since 2000 means that there are more children of 10 and 11 in the state education system, increase in immigration in some areas of the country, and the rising cost of private education. However, there is no doubt that places at the best state schools are in high demand²³ and that the whole process is full of anxiety and worry for the parents. In fact, the 'Good Schools Guide', which used to focus on helping parents choose private education in the UK, now provides guidance on how to secure the best state school place for your child. I would argue that the limitations that these factors place on demand mean that parents have to think carefully and strategically to secure the best place for their child and, therefore, they have to engage with the school choice process to achieve this.

The process of choosing the right school for your child and expressing a preference is often accompanied by the worry and strategising that goes with the school choice process (Ball 2003; Wilkins 2011; O'Brien 2007). Questions like 'should we move closer to the school?', 'can we claim a religious right?', or 'can we afford to send them to private school?' Often enter parents' heads to determine what strategy would get their child a place. Following the National Offer Day on 1 March, which can lead to

²² In 2016, only 68.5% of the children in Birmingham got their first choice of school and 6.6% were not offered any school at all. This is largely thought to be the effect of a baby boom and immigration. This situation resulted in the government pledging an extra £100 million to tackle the crisis.

²³ The most oversubscribed school in England in 2015 was the Al-Hirjah Muslim Secondary school in Birmingham, which had 18 applications for every place it had on offer. Herschel Grammar school in Slough had 14 applications for every place and Langley Grammar school in Berkshire had 13 for every place.

months of agonising for some involving appeals, going on the waiting lists for a school and looking for a better option. Parents are often willing to go to great lengths to secure the right place for their child and, therefore, for many parents, significant time and energy is put into the process.

What do we know about the experience of choice?

To understand the often-strategic actions that parents take, it is important to appreciate how parents think about choice and their experience of it. There is strong support for school choice; 72% of parents, when surveyed, believed that parents should have the basic right to choose (Exley 2011). Data from the 2010 British Attitudes Survey showed that 41% of parents believed that they were right to avoid the most local school if the performance was under par. The research also shows that parents place a high value on the education received at secondary school and were interested in factors such as performance, discipline and social mix when choosing a school. However, although many parents do engage with the school choice process and cast their net widely, many show a preference for their local school.

Much has been written about the way in which parents, once given the right to express a preference for a particular school, went about manifesting this right. Earlier research focused on structural aspects of the school choice process and how parents developed strategies and levered advantage to secure the best school for their child; much of this research could now be considered historic, but still holds valuable information about the ways in which parents go about choosing schools. Research by Ball and Vincent (1998) focused on the 'hot' knowledge that gets passed down on

parental grapevines – gossip, informal conversation, word of mouth, etc. The knowledge passed down on the grapevine was seen to hold more weight for parents and value than the objective ‘cold’ knowledge: league tables, Ofsted reports, etc., which were considered untrustworthy.²⁴ It is easy to see that Ofsted reports and league tables would be a difficult source of information for some to use and evaluate as the language can be complex and challenging to access; therefore the groups using these methods are more likely to be educated, professional and middle class. Other research has proposed staged models that parents go through when choosing a school for their child. Gorard (1996) outlined a 3-step model that parents go through to choose the right school and, although structurally useful as a description, it does rather ignore the socially embedded nature of the process. Suffice to say that there are different models that families use to come to their final choice (Flatley et al. 2001; Bradley and Taylor 2007; Coldron et al. 2008).

There is also evidence (Wilkins 2011, 2010; O’Brien 2007; David 1993) that, when making the decision about which school to choose, there is a gender bias with women doing much of the choosing and the ‘legwork’ involved in the school choice process (David et al. 1993). This gender bias will be explored more in the following chapter. However, it is noted here that mothers are the lynchpin in the process.

We also know that families who are advantaged ²⁵are more likely to gain a place at a good school, while those who are societally disadvantaged, either by socioeconomic group, ethnicity, etc., tend to miss out (Conway, 1997; Levacic and Hardman, 1998;

²⁴ A report from the Sutton Trust found that only 57% of parents considered Ofsted reports when making a school choice and this dropped to 39% of parents who looked at league tables (Francis and Hutchings 2013).

²⁵ In terms of having the capacity to use information to choose, provide extra tuition for their children or move to an address within a particular catchment area.

Reay, 1998a). Burgess and Briggs (2006) suggest that choosing the right school for the child is crucial to their performance within that school, while Thomas and Mortimore (1994) claim that an effective school can make the difference between six Grade E's at GCSE and seven Grade C's.

Space and its relationship to choice

The 'choice' that the 1988 ERA strengthened is predicated on an assumption that parents will want to choose the school that their child attends and will be able to access this choice, essentially weakening the link between residence and the secondary school attended (Allen 2006). However, where a school has too many applications for the spaces available, they will enable allocation of places according to a set of criteria and distance to school is often high up on that list. The competition for places means that proximity to good schools is a factor that people take into consideration when planning where to live. Schirmer et al. (2014), showed that people rated the proximity of good educational facilities to be a positive influence regarding choice of residence and where a secondary school has a good rate of GCSE's grades A*-C, this was also a positive influence (Andrew and Meen 2006). These geographical issues of the supply of good school places mean that over time, catchment areas shrink as the residences surrounding good schools become more geographically and socially exclusive (Hamnet and Butler 2013). Additionally, it means that school choice has to be contextualised by local housing markets and creates residential sorting, which can limit choice, meaning the wealthiest can choose to live close to the good schools that they wish to access for their children; however, the disadvantaged will not be able to access accommodation in those areas (and by

definition the schools in those areas) because of high rents or sale prices. The phenomenon of high house prices surrounding outstanding secondary schools, and house prices rising when a school improves, is well documented (Collinson 2014).

Geography and local space places other limits on choice for parents seeking access to schools. Firstly there is the difference in rural and urban/metropolitan locations. Research (Allen and Burgess 2010, Burgess et al. 2011) shows differences in the number and type of schools available for children who live in a prescribed area, with metropolitan areas faring significantly better regarding range and type of school than those who live in suburban or rural locations. Burgess et al. (2009) found that within 3 km of metropolitan houses there was an average of 19 secondary schools available, but this drops to three for those living in towns and villages. The difference in the number of schools is large and illustrates a disparity in the power of the choices available to some parents, depending on the location in which they live – limiting choice severely. However, living in urban/metropolitan areas can also restrict choice because competition between families for the best school places is high. Research shows that, in London, only 60% of families receive their first choice school and this suggests that living in a metropolitan area actually limits choice (Exley 2011). Therefore, families who live in more rural areas have less choice of schools available to them; however, the competition for a place at these schools is less, meaning that they are more likely to obtain a place at their chosen school.

Another limit that geography and space puts on choice is that of transport. Transport concerns travel to school and travel is something that affects rural and metropolitan parents in differing ways. Wealthier families may be able to increase their pool of

choice by adding private schools; they are also able to pay for transport to and from their chosen school. However, this is an option that might not be available for disadvantaged families,²⁶ reducing their choices to the schools that they can afford to access on a daily basis. The 1996 Education Act made provision for children of families on a low income. If the family received Working Tax Credit, then the child receives free transport to school if they are aged 8-11 and the school is under three miles away; or, if the child is over 11, they receive free transport to any of the three nearest qualifying schools. Free transport helps children from less wealthy backgrounds to access a wider range of schools; however, it would only be of use in a wider metropolitan area where schools are closer together and would not be appropriate for poorer families living in rural areas.

Research has shown that not only are parents restricted by physical space but that they recognise this and factor it into their decision-making. David et al. (1994) researched parents who were in the process of choosing secondary schools for the children in inner London and looked at what factors parents offered for their choices. The research found that parents most frequently offered Performance (academic results), pleasant feel (atmosphere) and proximity (location near home) as being the three most important factors involved in parental choice. The research showed that 26% of parents involved noted proximity as being one of their key concerns showing

²⁶ Free school transport is provided for all children if they attend the nearest suitable school and they are less than two miles away (children under 8) or three miles away (children over 8) or there is no safe walking route. The local council is not responsible for providing school transport to any child if they choose a school out of their catchment area. Children with a statement of Special Educational Needs are entitled to free transport no matter what their age or where their school is located. This provision has been in place since the 1944 Education Act and costs local councils over £1 billion every year.

that the physical closeness of the school was a determining factor in choice, but it was not cited as a reason that parents liked or disliked a school.

However, I would contend that geography and space are not something that are just experienced in a physical way and that it also has a psychological aspect. Most of the research cited above looks at proximity to school in a physical way, in terms of meters and time taken to travel. We are linked to the space we inhabit, in many ways, and Savage et al. (2005) asserts that people define themselves by the residential space they inhabit, and it provides a sense of belonging and makes explicit our social positions. Choosing a particular residential space and inhabiting it for a period of time also nurtures our personal and private networks within this space (Hanson and Pratt 1995) and creates restrictions on choice that are unbeneficial to less spatially mobile groups. The experience of residential space is complicated by social and kin networks that tie us to space psychologically (Jarvis 1999), and I would expect this experience to have significant impact on the school choice process in the same way that physical space would.

Choice is consequently experienced in different ways depending on where you are placed geographically and how you experience that space and this effects the spatial mobility of parents. Research has shown that over 50% of children attend their local school, which means that approximately 50% do not.

A last, but prevailing, factor, which is almost an umbrella theme covering most of the points noted above, is that of class. Class is not necessarily socioeconomically dependent and can be defined as: 'an identity and a lifestyle, and a set of perspectives

on the social world and relationships in it...' (Ball 2003, p. 6). The middle classes are more actively likely to choose a school for their children as they have more cultural, social and economic capital to call on to make these choices. They also have a more educated approach from which to challenge the status quo (i.e. the local school) if it is not good enough for their child. A discussion of social class and its impact on school choice is scattered throughout this chapter, suffice it to say that it has a tremendous impact and is a recurring theme (Ball and Vincent 2001, Ashworth 1988, Levacic and Woods 2002, Fitz et al. 2002).

Summary

Through examining the historical foundations of market orientation in English education, the demonstration of its far-reaching and wide-ranging effects are clear. The Neoliberal reforms were introduced into education with the intention of having positive effects on the attainment of schools and to raise the achievement of all students. However, the policies have had impacts on society and the education system in a negative way, and the effects these have had on individuals need to be further explored. The focus of the next chapter turns to motherhood and the way it intersects with education.

Chapter 4

Motherhood And Life Transitions

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature surrounding motherhood, identity and performance. I begin by considering how motherhood has been historically defined and some different perspectives, before assessing how women are affected by the transition to motherhood, to examine what it means to be a mother. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that motherhood is a strong and pervasive category, which is relevant to society, which all women inhabit at some level (even if that level is absence of motherhood). Also that the performance of 'mother' changes and develops along with the life transitions of both the mother and the child. I will contend that these changes occur by performance and transformation, being linked and mediated through relationships between the mother, child and society in general and the discourses that they inhabit.

Defining Motherhood

Adrienne Rich (1976) wrote 'all human life on the planet is born of woman' (p. 11). This quote sums up the importance of women to society and the continuance of the species. Motherhood is sometimes defined by a woman's ability to bear children. It is not only a biological, but a social construction defined by society's norms, values and dominant discourses. Although a temporary act, it can subsume the whole of a woman's classification of herself indefinitely (Lawler 1996, p. 154, Buchanan 2013). Biology, albeit a pervasive aspect of the definition, is not exclusive; surrogacy,

adoption, assisted fertility can all be part of motherhood, without the necessity of being able to biologically bear children. Traditionally motherhood has been linked to the biological function of giving birth, but there is a multitude of experiences, which are not reliant on this factor. Motherhood, I would argue affects all women in one-way or another and is as unique as a fingerprint in the way that it is performed and expressed. It is impossible to provide a singular definition of motherhood, as it is not the subject of consensus. It is the arena of much debate by women, the media and society as a whole, which all draw on different experiences to create their perspectives.²⁷ Women will be confronted by different ideas about what and how they should perform motherhood daily. We inhabit, construct, enact and reproduce motherhood in an infinite number of ways.

Although there is no general agreement on how motherhood should be enacted (Hays 1996; Acker 2006; Mcquillan, Greil, Shreffler and Tichenor 2008), there is agreement that motherhood is critical to society and is not just based on the view that women provide a 'flowerpot for a man's seed' (Rothman 1989, pg. 248-249). Anne Crittenden, in her book *The Price of Motherhood*, suggests:

²⁷ The changes in ideologies of motherhood have accompanied changes in society – such as the rise of industrialisation, the expansion of feminism, changes in political and religious views and the economy. These changes have brought with them differences in the way that mothers are conceptualised and treated. The current media fixation with mothering, motherhood and celebrity mothers has drawn the perceptions wider and created new and fragmented views of motherhood.

"In a truly diverse world, people with direct child-rearing experience should be well-represented in positions of power. Every institution should ask itself not only 'Do we have enough blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and women in our high ranks?' but also 'Do we have enough people who have spent serious time with children?' Parenting... ought to be seen as a credential."

(Crittenden, 2001 p.274)

Whether or not one agrees with the statement, I would argue that it suggests motherhood is imperative and should be represented universally as being so as, without mothers, we cannot raise the next generation. However, the debates about what is a good mother, whether mothers should be in paid work, bottle or breastfeeding – debates which are represented daily in the media ²⁸– all suggest a veneer of institutionalisation and normalisation along with a potential blame culture rather than value and power.

The performance of motherhood varies according to culture, tradition, age, and a multitude of other factors, meaning that it is not a universal, singular experience and it is accepted that women internalise and personalise their definition based on individual experience and exposure.²⁹ Women, whether they are mothers or not, are defined by their relationship to motherhood.³⁰ It is, therefore, a central role in society

²⁸ Examples include news articles such as 'Longer breast feeding Boosts IQ', *Daily Mail*, March 2015, TV programmes such as 'Extreme Parenting' with Jo Frost, films such as *Steel Magnolias*, *Terminator*, and *Dumbo*.

²⁹ Factors affecting the performance of motherhood are endless; however, thought to be have the most impact were differences in parenting (how their own mothers enacted motherhood), richness of social and economic resources available and congenital differences (Lamb 2012). These factors are accompanied by exposure from elsewhere in the media and society in general.

³⁰ Women are often defined by where they are in the motherhood continuum – questions like 'when are you going to have kids?', 'have your kids flown the nest?', 'did you never plan to have children?' expose a set of beliefs which value women only in their relationship to motherhood and not as individuals,

and engenders a traditional feminine set of characteristics linked to nurturance and care (Letherby 1994). Whether women are mothers or not seems irrelevant, as it remains a defining feature of women as perceived by others and, therefore, somehow essential to being a woman in modern society; tied up with any sense of womanhood and one's value.

Perspectives on Motherhood

There are a wealth of perspectives explaining motherhood, its presentation and place in society; however, much of the development of these ideologies has been over the last 60 years, although several earlier theories dating back to the turn of the 19th century hold important ideas for current times. These developments are due to the significant amount of social change and upheaval during the period and the effects of change in the modern world.³¹ It is out of the scope of this work to discuss multiple perspectives on motherhood in detail; I shall focus on Freud, Lawler, Bowlby and Chodorow for their impact and ideas.

Freud provided one of the first theoretical conceptions of motherhood. His Psychoanalytic theory proposed that mothers were the primary love object for their child and responsible for their optimal development (Freud 1905). According to Freud, during psychosexual development,³² boys' and girls' psyches diverge to create

with an integral value to society without childbearing futures, presents or histories. (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ulrich and Weatherall 2000; Ireland 1993).

³¹ The types of social changes referred to are, for example, the move to women working outside of the home, improvements in modern technology changing family and working life, the development of childhood as a protected social stage, feminism as a large social movement, etc.

³² Freud proposed that psychological development takes place over a series of fixed psychosexual stages with each stage being focused on a different part of the body. This theory conveys the

differences in the way they go on to develop. These differences are resolved through the Oedipus complex for boys and the Electra complex for girls. During young and mid-infancy, the child is close to the mother, and she is almost the sole source of love, nourishment and care; however, during the complex resolution, boys move away from the mother to identify with their powerful father, while girls react differently:

“Girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage.”

(Freud 1933, 1965, p.124)

This quote contextualises some of the ways that society sees mothers and the way motherhood is performed, it also highlights a theme in motherhood research that centres on mothers and daughters. These ideas have been developed in more recent scholarship, for example in the work of Lawler (1996), who has explored the ways in which social narratives are woven through the mother/daughter relationship and how this comes to affect women in forming and reforming their identities and performances. Although the criticisms of Freud are wide-ranging and prolific, they are outside the limits of this work. Although I believe Freud is helpful to consider how the construction of gendered identity in children (and by default adults) has come to be represented and why the idea of an essential self is so persistent. It also suffices to say that his theories provided a starting point for the theoretical and practical work of many others and remains an essential building block for ideologies of mothering and the perception of women in society.

development in the ways that sexual energy accumulates and is discharged as we mature biologically. According to Freud, the first five years of life and the way in which we move through the psychosexual stages is a crucial period in the formation of adult personality.

It is useful to look at the ideas of Lawler and how they counter those of Freud at this point and develop a Foucauldian approach to motherhood. Lawler (1996) approaches from the traditional position that mothers in society are responsible for creating balanced individuals, maintaining a stable society and creating well-adjusted children through good mothering. Natural/good mothering, the idea that women are sensitive, in-tune and totally absorbed by their children's needs, Lawler argues, has come to define the mother/daughter relationship and the discourses which surround it. Where Lawler departs from a Psychoanalytic understanding is the recognition that the focus on 'natural' mothering is the expression of class and what we think of as natural mothering is middle-class mothering in Euro-American culture. All other forms of mothering which don't meet these middle-class standards are then demonised as abnormal (single mothers, teen mothers, etc.). Lawler, in interviewing women who were mothers and daughters found that they constructed themselves as autonomous, independent individuals through a strong dis-identification with the mother, arguing that these women were deeply aware of the normalising middle-class discourses. She identified this as a type of matrophobia, rather than it being a simple identification/rejection as posed by Freud, it was more about moving from one class position to another and the fear of returning to the class of their mother (rather than just disliking their mother's characteristics). Lawler goes on to add that mothers do acknowledge the impossibility of living outside the traditional mother/daughter discourses and that they show resistance in understanding that the construction of the mother/daughter self is an adaption to the ongoing products of social and political dynamics. This position on motherhood construction and how it intersects with how women perform motherhood recognises the class based knowledge and gendered

notions which are ensnared in these appropriate constructions of good motherhood rather than relying on just a psychological explanation of how women might come to perform motherhood and understand their gendered position.

Following Freud, developmental psychology in the 1950s created a whole new approach to theorising motherhood: Maternal Deprivation Theory. This theoretical movement was accompanied by an acceleration of the culture of blaming mothers for any perceived deficits in their children (and families). It was also harnessed politically to serve a post-war societal agenda and gave the government the justification for closing nurseries and withdrawing support from mothers that they had during the war (David and New 1985; Rodman 1987). John Bowlby (1951) researched children who were removed from their mothers during the first three years of their lives³³ and concluded that maternal deprivation from birth-3 years caused irreversible damage to the child (labelled Affectionless Psychopathology). These conclusions provided politicians with a scientific basis for pronouncing that a mother's place was in the home so as not to damage their offspring. Although the research was flawed,³⁴ politically it was useful because the government were able to tell mothers to stay at home with their children to prevent a generation of damaged families; which resulted in them vacating the paid employment taken up during the war years (1939-1945), thus leaving enough jobs for the de-mobbed male armed forces to fall back into. This is not the first instance of women having their status as mothers manipulated to create a society planned by the patriarchal establishment, and it is a trend, which

³³ Bowlby (1944) studied the effects of early maternal deprivation by looking at the behaviour and family histories of 44 delinquent boys. He took case studies of the boys and found that, in 17 of the 44 boys, there had been a prolonged separation from the mother.

³⁴ Bowlby's research was problematic on many fronts. However, some of the criticisms revolve around the unrepresentativeness of the sample who were all delinquents and their recollection of historical events.

continued for many years.³⁵ Another expression of natural mothering comes from the work of Donald Winnicott, a respected post-war psychoanalyst and paediatrician. Winnicott gave over 50 broadcasts on BBC radio giving advice on how to be a 'good enough mother'. The 'good enough mother' is a set of exacting standards that women have to live up to, to be good mothers, as defined by Winnicott and judged by society. Winnicott's advice is an example of the manipulation of mothers and the direction of the performance of motherhood to be something, which served society rather than individual women, children and families and represents both the genuine, but misplaced value placed on motherhood. Foucault argued this point regarding governmentality, which can be taken as the way government tries to produce the citizens best suited to government policy and the ways in which these citizens are governed through organised practices. Women who are mothers are expected to operate in a practical way to ensure that they take on child rearing, that women identify with their children as nurturers, and regulating families by controlling the reproduction of the next generation of citizens by shoring up the dominant culture (Goodwin and Huppertz 2010, Foucault 1993), and this is an important motivator of performance. However, it was the major social change that happened in the 1960s and 1970s, accompanied by the power of the feminist movements, which saw significant strides forward in the understanding of motherhood and its place in society. Although feminism was not initially convincing or persuasive enough to fight Bowlby's research conclusions, those who supported him and the prevailing perspective into obscurity, it was enough to offer women and mothers an alternative.

³⁵ There have been many policies that have interfered with motherhood in order to suit society. Women's rights to abortion were enshrined in law in 1967; in 2015, the UK government increased free childcare to 30 hours, therefore getting mothers back into work, and flexible working arrangements have all contributed to changes in motherhood organisation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were several changes to society, which affected women,³⁶ and, more specifically, mothers. Feminism is amongst the most powerful of these. The rise of the second wave of feminism in the 1960's was founded on the fight for true equality; where universal suffrage had been the goal of the first wave, the second wave recognised urgency for equality in all aspects of the female journey. In earlier years, women's lives were limited in most respects. They were expected to follow a narrow path of marriage, motherhood and homemaking, these tasks being set against a backdrop of submission to their husbands as head of the household – however, they were not expected just to follow this path, but to embrace it with happiness and gratitude. Where women did work, they were limited to careers such as teaching, nursing or secretarial work. Women's narrow journey limited their paths away from employment, politics or academia. The second wave of feminism challenged women's acceptance of these inequalities in society and began to break down traditional perceptions of women as wives, mothers, employees and individuals. Feminists, amongst other things, confronted the prevailing Freudian theories of motherhood and allowed women to express doubt that motherhood was 'natural and inevitable' and that their fulfillment in life should not be exclusively maternal. The ideas expressed here are brief, but give a flavour of how women were regaining control of their bodies and their lives. Focusing on equality, feminists such as de Beauvoir (1949) in 'The Second Sex' and Betty Friedan in 'The Feminine Mystique' (1963) claimed that women's ability to give birth was a source of female subordination. de Beauvoir (1949) went further in suggesting that women were doomed by their biological predetermination to pregnancy and then socially

³⁶ The changes in the 1960s and 1970s included, but are not limited to: strikes by women in some organisations (e.g. Ford plant in Dagenham), a freely available contraceptive pill in 1961, the legalisation of abortion and women's rights to it in 1964, the sex discrimination act and the right for women to have equal pay in the workplace in 1975 and the first female UK Prime Minister in 1979.

restricted to the home by motherhood. Friedan labelled the phenomena as ‘the problem that has no name’ (p. 15) and was quick to note the discontent and unfulfilled lives of mothers during that time. The natural limits, alongside the social conditioning of women by the media, politicians, schools and other institutions, meant that women’s potential to contribute to society was limited, if at all.

Perspectives on motherhood, especially those influenced by feminist theories, are important as they challenge the idea that motherhood is a biological imperative and confront the assertion that motherhood and womanhood are synonymous; they also seek to explain why it is a central part of life. Moreover, and especially necessary for this research, these theories explore the sense of identity that a woman attains from motherhood:

“inevitably motherhood ideology reaches deeply into the lives of individuals and family processes, rhetorically proclaimed it shapes women’s very identities and activities even when resisted, mothering ideologies forms the backdrop for action and assessment.”

(Arendell 1999 pg. 3)

An influential feminist theory of motherhood was developed by Nancy Chodorow (1978, p. 6), who blamed sexual inequality in society on the gendered division of labour. She concluded that women were imprisoned in the home as mothers, while men were valued in the workforce outside the home. She went on to suggest that a person’s sense of identity is developed alongside the mother, who forms the most important relationship in a child’s life and, hence, proposed Object Relations Theory, which is psychoanalytic in its basis. She used these ideas to shape thoughts on the

patterns of male dominance in society, suggesting that the ever-present mother leaves men struggling for ultimate control and feelings of resentment – which is why they attempt to become dominant over women in later life. This is different from the ways that daughters behave, as they seek to and are encouraged to share a core female identity with their mother. Chodorow believed that the only way to gain equality in society would be to develop shared parenting techniques, which would then create social change. Although Chodorow's work has been criticised for including the experiences of only white, middle-class women, her skills at multidisciplinary thought is unsurpassed, and her ideas shape much of what we think about motherhood today and how it is represented in the political arena. I would tend to agree that it sounds reasonable to suggest that a child would gather some sense of how to perform motherhood from their mother, although I would argue that the child gains this from viewing the mother as 'mother' rather than as an individual. Therefore, it would suggest that mothering/motherhood is socially constructed and, therefore, difficult to deconstruct.

The perspectives of Freud, Lawler, Winnicott, Bowlby and Chodorow show how motherhood is central to contemporary society and to our understanding of the expectations made of women (Ridgeway and Correll 2004) and, therefore, the effects that this has on their performance of motherhood. These theories provide contextualization for understanding the place of mothers/motherhood, both historically and in modern society. To appreciate how mothers perform motherhood, the next step is to explore how women transition to motherhood.

The Transition To Motherhood

The transition to motherhood is a short, long, simple, complicated, easy, hard, painful, straightforward and difficult process. All of these experiences are valid and, therefore, I would argue that transition to the position of 'mother' is individual and determined by different factors.³⁷ It is to this transition I now turn to explore how life transitions, specifically motherhood, affect women and the way they perform it.

General Transition theory has a long history in many disciplines ³⁸ and is one way to consider the move into motherhood. Much work on transition theory stems from Van Gennep (1960), Turner (1969) and Sheehy (1977), who considered the way that sociocultural rituals accompany transitions during all life stages. Transition can be considered as a movement through life or a passage of change from one life phase to another; it is not always a singular event, but an 'inner reorientation and self-definition' (Bridges 2004, p.12). Undergoing a life transition means that a person's sense of reality is changing by either a forced, chosen or natural event; therefore, they have to develop a new sense of reality within which to operate (Selder 1989) and a potential reorientation of the performance of their identity.

There are many models of the way in which transitions work. This collection of theories, known as Life Course Perspectives, propose that transitions occur in stages and follow a process (Elder et al. 2003; Hagestad 2003; Hser et al. 2007). As Giele and

³⁷ Factors such as parenting history (Lamb 2012), the meaning the mother attributes to the situation (positive or negative) (Shin et al 2007), prior educational attainment (Gustafsson 2001) occupation (Haynes 2008) and more.

³⁸ Transition theories are evident in several disciplines such as education (Schlossberg et al. 1995), personal psychology (Fisher 2005), nursing (Meleis 2010), and politics (Marx 1867).

Elder (1998) suggest, life course is defined as 'a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time' (Elder 1988 p. 22). Life is full of these transitions: starting school, getting your first job, leaving home, retirement, etc. Many of these transitions relate to changes in family life such as births, marriages, deaths, etc. (Carter & McGoldrick 2005; Hagestad 2003). These transitions all change family status, roles and identities as people and institutions enter and exit our lives.

Generally, with life transitions, one phase ends and another starts, but what is common with all of these life events or changes is that they all affect behaviour and the performance of identities. However, life course transitions are not necessarily moments of change, which occur and alter our lives forever. We are always preparing, changing, evolving, etc. in response to and in preparation of these life transitions and the moment of change is more an intense period of performativity where we act how society expects us to (or a subversion of expectations). Research has shown that these transformations affect how the person views the world (Vohs and Schooler 2008, Mikulincer and Shaver 2001, Cook-Greuter 2000, Dunbar 2008, Keltner and Haidt 2003, Schlitz, Vieten and Amorak 2008). However, these models do not account for the dimensions of difference, which are present during all transitions, and critics argue that most transitions do not follow linear, chronological trajectories (Kralik 2002). What is evident is that, for a shift to happen, the person undergoing it has to acknowledge the change, engage with it and understand it, only then can individuals begin to reorganise their lives and learn new ways of being and responding to the world.

The transition to motherhood is a major life event and affects women in different ways; sometimes it happens by accident, sometimes after years of planning and it can

arouse feelings of joy, a sense of fulfillment and challenge to women. However, becoming a mother is not always a straightforward transition and joyful and, in many women; they find that the period is accompanied by a sense of anxiety, stress, feelings of incompetence, a sense of loss of previous experiences that one may have inhabited and time and loneliness (Nicholson 1999). It is important to understand how they first experience the transition to motherhood, as this will have an influence on their performance of motherhood.

The transition to motherhood starts at different times, and each stage involves a significant period of adjustment for the woman, her partner and the wider social network.³⁹ Changes that need to occur during this transition involve physical, mental, reworking, responding to the needs of a newborn and many others, which frame the task as not inconsequential (Burley 2003, O'Reilly 2010, Darvill et al. 2010). It is a critical developmental stage in a woman's life, which involves rapid psychological and social change (Malacrida 2009, Miller 2005, Marshall et al. 2007) and, although there is little denying that there may be incredible positive emotions generated by having a child, it is a demanding and responsible job, with enormous potential negative impacts – for women are expanding to incorporate another being. On delivering a baby, a woman begins the process to maternal role attainment, which is the way in which she becomes able to blend the new role of mother with her previous identities and becomes comfortable in inhabiting these new functions roles and responsibilities and performing motherhood. Women learn to become mothers in many different ways: watching their mothers, the media, observing their female relatives and other

³⁹ Transition for the father (Halle et al. 2008), transition for the couple (Cowan and Cowan 1988) and transition for the wider family (Johns and Belsky 2007).

people around them, social and cultural norms in society, stereotypes, etc. Research has suggested that the transition to motherhood is something which progresses in a linear way for most women and incorporates the elements of a woman committing to the role, caring for a newborn and accepting the presence of a child (Mercer 1985; Nelson 2003). However, it is an ongoing, constant process. The changes that occur during the transition to motherhood chart a course for the woman over the development of her and her child's life span. How a woman navigates these choppy waters of maternal role attainment will determine how she responds to many life transitions involving herself and the child and the reality of being a mother.

I have argued that the transition to motherhood is a major life event which is a complex process, not always joyful, and which involves significant social and psychological changes for the woman, the people surrounding her. This transition results in the performance of motherhood. To understand how the performance of motherhood occurs, I will now look at the way that normative discourses of motherhood affect this performance.

The Normative Discourses Of Motherhood

As established, identity is not a singular thing that exists solidly and unwavering; it is constructed in various ways and something we perform rather than inhabit. There is no doubt that 'mother' is a biological, social and psychological category and how women occupy and carry out the role of mother is the subject of ongoing debate about what it means to be a mother. Motherhood is not fixed; as women discuss what it means, read literature, consume media, etc., the experiences shift and sway. We are

actively constructing the meaning of what mothering is and its expectations. I will now look at some of the dominant discourses of mothering focusing on Intensive Mothering and The Good Mother to understand some of the factors that drive the performance of motherhood in society.

Motherhood and mothering are relatively recent sociological concepts. Oakley (1976) in 'Women's work: the housewife, past and present', explained how motherhood as a description of a women's role, did not exist culturally before the 1850s. Before this time, the family lived as a holistic economic unit, where each person (including children) had an important role to play and these roles were not necessarily gendered. However, as the march of industrialisation quickened pace, labour laws for children were renegotiated, meaning that they had to spend some time in school and less time in the workplace. This placed financial demands on the family and raised questions about who would care for the children when they were not at work. The situation was largely resolved by the home shifting to be the woman's focus and our conceptions of mainstream mothering were created (i.e. the mother staying at home with the children to provide childcare and look after the home).

The realm of the home and children being the woman's has shaped what we know now as the dominant ideology in mothering, which is Intensive Mothering (Garey 1999; Hays 1996). This is best understood as being child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive, and in which the mother is responsible for nurturing and developing the child (Hays 1996). This discourse has a long tradition and is what most people recognise as the performance of motherhood (Winnicott 1953). This ideology of Intensive Mothering has become

not only dominant in Western society, but also in the media, culture and within the psyche. It is dominated by books, Internet forums, TV shows and baby experts – all of whom are on hand to show you how to give of yourself totally to your child. This ideology has wide-ranging effects on mothers and the way in which society views them. Being devoted to the care of others and being defined by self-sacrifice, assuming that women will become pregnant and produce happy, healthy children is a prominent expectation placed on women by the discourse – making them accountable for what goes wrong, but not congratulated when things go well (Arendell 2000). This leaves women with a moral commitment to their relationships and responsibility for producing healthy, well-rounded adults (Hays 1996). Not only are women held by these expectations, but they are judged by them. These expectations and judgments obscures the power relationships between men and women; as men understand that these expectations of women are accurate and desired, leaving few spaces for choice and the inequality experienced by mothers due to this discourse, produces a structurally unequal society.

Within the ideology of intensive mothering, there are various discourses which structure our ideas and knowledge about mothering and motherhood and, despite the years of feminist criticism (Ruddick 1995) of these discourses, they are as dominant as ever in many parts of life. One such discourse According to Goodwin and Huppertz (2010), is the Good Mother: ‘a formidable social construct placing pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideals, on which they are judged and judge themselves’. The Good Mother, according to Arendell (1999), is:

“middle class, heterosexual, married, monogamous, white and native born. She is not economically self-sufficient, which means given the persistent gender gap in earnings, largely depend on her income earning husband (unless she is independently wealthy and, in that case, allows her husband to handle the finances) she is not employed.”

(Arendell 1999 p. 3)

Additionally, she is ‘naturally equipped and always readily available to care for the children no matter what the circumstances’ (Krane and Davies 2007, pg. 6). This discourse shapes the performance of motherhood and the meaning of mothering for women; it determines how they act, think, behave and feel.⁴⁰ Ruddick (2001, pg. 189), meanwhile, concludes that ‘The good mother casts a long shadow over other women’s lives’ by determining the way in which they think they should mother and provides the ultimate idealistic tool for other people to judge mothers against.

The Good Mother discourse, it can be argued, is functional according to the way in which society is organised. It operates in a practical way to ensure that women raise children to meet the requirements of society (Goodwin and Huppertz 2010, Foucault 1993). In this way, the government provides that good citizens are produced and learn to reproduce the practices of governance to keep society stable. These functions are not provided solely through coercion – the process occurs through the media, government policy, and organisation of institutions such as schools and the workplace, through ensuring that women conform to the norms and regulate

⁴⁰ The Good Mother narrative is entrenched in social and cultural norms, which we now take for granted. These have shaped motherhood and its performance by creating expectations of women and the way that motherhood is shaped by the culture surrounding it (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998).

themselves (Spigel and Baraister 2009). In essence, the Good Mother discourse has independent power, and many women are driven to achieve it as they don't see an alternative.

Of course, alongside the Good Mother, there are various other competing and complementary discourses: the bad mother, the teenage mother, the working mother, the lesbian mother, etc. All of these, to some extent, have an effect on shaping who mothers are, but none of these discourses is a stable representation; instead, they are enacted, defined and judged differently in different situations and in multiple forms. What is striking within these discourses is the normalisation of their use to punish mothers (Furedi 2008) and to set the standards, unrealistic or otherwise, against which they are held. In fact, Furedi asserts that mothers have become the independent variable that explains virtually everything, from poor results at school to speech impediments – the list is endless. The relentless power of these discourses gives rise to Douglas and Michael's assertion that 'the most tyrannical of our cultural icons: the perfect mom' (2004 pg. 20).

These discourses, whether they are accepted or rejected, form a societal norm. As part of this, women are socialised into a culture where they are the primary caregiver for not only the next generation but increasingly for the previous generation. Women, therefore, inhabit a discourse of caregiving and being in relationships where they are expected to give of themselves to others (Miller 1976). Some have proposed that women gain their sense of self through these caregiving relationships. Surry (1985) conceptualised women's care relationship as the primary means through which the self is organised and matured and that women would be unable to develop a sense of self

in isolation. While I find it difficult to identify wholly with Surry's position, I would argue that relationships are the key site of the performance of motherhood rather than of primary importance in identity development. Women may rely on relationships to develop their performance of motherhood, but this is more to do with women's position in society and their socialisation. Women are brought up against a backdrop of expectations and configurations of caregiving relationships and, for many women, the opportunities to develop outside of these are limited.

Therefore, I would argue that women adopt a strategy of developing their sense of self within these care-giving relationships as these are the optimal niche within which motherhood can be performed. When women choose relationships within which to organise and develop their sense of self, they opt for a default position and are not fighting society's views or expectations of them. This may lead them to feel freer to pursue other performance projects internally with different hierarchies of salience while maintaining an externally acceptable performance which is within the accepted discourses. If this is the case, then the life transitions of the child (and the mother) will affect the relationship between them and, therefore, the mother's performance of motherhood.

Performing Motherhood And Performativity

The discussion of normative discourses about motherhood above shows that women are fed a series of rules, norms and practices about what it means to be a mother and that these perform a regulatory function to ensure that women perform in the right way to bring up children in a society that functions. However, whereas these explain

what women are supposed to do, they do not explain how women mother, this is where performativity as a mother is a powerful theoretical idea. I think it is accepted that women are 'girded' or trained into being women. However, the literature up to now seems to view women as reborn as mothers at the birth of a child – therefore as an instant thing rather than something in process (Coats and Fraustino 2015). This almost immediate transition to motherhood, I believe is, because motherhood is seen as a normal, natural state and not seen in a broader context (Sultana 2013). This static view of something I cannot see as valid, as motherhood is an active social process, not a fixed, stable state. Chandler (1998, pg. 273) puts it well 'it is my position that 'mother' is best understood as a verb, as something one does'. An active embodiment positions motherhood as performative within these discourses, with each being a carrier and a receiver of these norms and practices, therefore ensuring that they are there for other women (Halkier 2016). These normative and dominant discourses provide the scripts, which women follow. However, the discourses do not cause mothers behaviour, but rather produce the phenomena of mother. Women perform within these discourses, either by working within the demarcations of the discourses or by interrupting and disrupting if they don't fit or work – giving an endless number of ways that motherhood can be enacted, which are seen as socially eligible (Hartzell 2016). Therefore partially supporting Surry's (1985) ideas, the discourses associated norms, practices, behaviours and scripts are constantly changing. These changes occur both with shifts in society, but also as the child gets older and the scripts for motherhood change. Transitions change the dynamics of motherhood and therefore are a key site for performativity, giving a range of options for counter performance, dis-identification and actions outside of the prescription (Powers 2013). Mother becomes a place in time, rather than eternity (Coats and Fraustino 2015).

How Is The Performance of Motherhood Affected By The School Transition?

There are many life transitions that a mother will go through during the life of her child/ren. It is established that the attainment and maintenance of the maternal role is not only linked to the age/stage of the child, but also to the transitions that the child is undertaking and the mother/child relationship. Although children go through many life transitions, with their mothers alongside them, little research exists on the effects of school transitions on the performance of motherhood. However, some research on the primary phase transition to school (age 4/5) has shown it to be one of the most challenging experiences in the early years (Reynolds, Weissberg and Kaspro 1992). The transition is marked by rapid changes and can be stressful on the child, the mother and the wider family (Dockett and Perry 2005b; Margetts 2002a). The transition involves changes to many areas of life, including the negotiation of new/different rules, social status, identity in education and a different relationship with parents; also, domestic routines undergo substantial reorganisation (Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese, Eckert 2008). The transition does not start and end on the day that the child enters school; rather, it is something that starts when they are beginning to be prepared for school and continues until after school commences and until adjustment has occurred (Sayers et al. 2012). The tensions involved in preserving the old while engaging with the new are bound to cause stress and anxiety for all concerned, especially the mother (Li et al. 2012). Mothers and other members of the family will spend time engaging with complex webs of information surrounding the school choice and engage in periods of worry and anxiety about what will happen (Carpenter and Austin 2008; Lilley 2014; Wilkinson 1996). However, it is not just this

that the mother and child are engaging with, Jarvis's (1999) work on the interconnectedness of home, work and family decisions illustrates that family decision making is incredibly complex and is situated within a tangled web of networks. There is an interdependency of decisions being made within locally embedded systems, which make critical decisions relating to mobility and attachment complicated and differentiated. Lilley (2014) is quick to point out that mothers engaging with the process are working within the discourse of the Good Mother and expect to be judged by their decisions; therefore, the pressure brought to bear upon them is considerable and Jarvis's (1999) work would contest that the decisions are not made freely.

Although the effects on mothers have been little studied during the life transition, these transitions are undoubtedly going to affect the way motherhood is performed. Transitions do become more understood as children leave and go to university/college – a transition known as empty nest syndrome. However, the earlier transitions associated with secondary schooling have not been nearly as well researched.

How Are Mothers Involved In The School Choice Process?

In society and educational policy, the term 'parents' has been used to refer to those who make the choices for their children; this conceals the reality that mothers do most of the 'legwork' and choosing during the school choice process (David et al. 1993). Their role in the school choice process is widely acknowledged in the literature (David et al. 1997; David et al. 1994; Ball, Vincent, Kemp and Pietikainen 2004). Educational policy in England for many years has been based on the parent making a

choice of secondary school to gain the best education for the child; however, as mothers take on the majority of the responsibility, they are being placed in a pressurised situation. School choice is, therefore, a gendered process:

“...in some traditional two parent families, decision making, including educational decisions, remains sex differentiated and largely a maternal responsibility. It is also the case that many mothers are reluctant to give up or renege on this responsibility.”

(David, West and Ribbens 1994, p. 131)

As the above quote suggests, when it comes to performing the tasks necessary to facilitate secondary school transition, mothers assume responsibility and undertake significant investment in the process (O’Brien 2007; David et al. 1997; David et al. 1994). Although the gendered nature of this process seems convincing, caring for children, in my opinion, is a genderless process. Women are needed to give birth, but there is a wide variety of alternative options available to people other than the mother to care for the child and arguments hold that, even though there is growing recognition of mothers in the education market, use of the term ‘parent’ appears frequently and negates women’s work and investment into the process, perpetuating the inequality of the lived experience (Reay 1998b). Added to this that women are increasingly held responsible for securing the best advantage for their children (whether this is socially, educationally, etc.), a mother’s role needs to be more fully understood.

There is evidence to suggest that mother's engagement with the school choice process exceeds the consumer role predicted by policy. O'Brien (2007: pg. 160), in her research into Irish mothers negotiating transition to secondary school, found that they undertook the work involved in the process as 'intensive emotional, educational carework', which they performed as a moral duty to their children.⁴¹ Wilkins (2011) frames school choice as 'affective labour' undertaken by the mother on behalf of their children, a process in which emotional engagement far outweighs a rational focus; this involves long-term preparation and planning, a set of behaviours focused on getting the best choice for the child and involves the private feelings of the mother. While this literature represents women as hardworking and logical consumers, there is evidence that not all mothers engage in the same way. Gillies (2007) argues that the role of the consumer is not equally available to all mothers, with working-class and ethnic minority mothers less able to understand themselves as consumers and act out the role which society requires of them, as discussed in chapter 3. The middle-class normality has become the dominant discourse and everything else is labelled as deviant. Engagement is a necessary feature of the process, but not something that every mother occupies in the same way. So, with the school choice process being such a large part of a mother's carework, it is necessary to understand what effects it would have on the mother. It is that which I now explore.

⁴¹ The emotional carework is characterised by a whole range of activities that mothers believe they 'must' and 'should' undertake (O'Brien 2005). These activities include but are not limited to: choosing the school, including school visits, looking at league table data, talking to teachers, etc., ensuring children are supported through assessments in order to secure a place at the school they choose, the organisation of uniforms, stationary, etc., and the logistics of school which will include transport and contact with friends.

The Effects Of School Transition On The Performance Of Motherhood

Because of the time that women spend with their children and their emotional engagement in their lives, I believe that women's performance of motherhood evolves in response to the mother/child relationship. Therefore, any changes or transitions that occur to the child and which affect the relationship would legitimately be expected to impact the way that the mother performs motherhood. One of the most important of these transitions is moving school, most notably the transition from primary to secondary school (O'Brien 2007, Wilkins 2011). Mothers of children who are at primary school inhabit a rather protected world of routine and familiarity associated with the school their child attends. This includes the established norms and practices of the school as well as the social aspects that accompany the primary school years.⁴² This culture would have been part of the mother and child's life for some years and will have formed a significant part of their social, individual and shared identities. Also, it is a culture in which the mother is included and expected to have a large role in. Change occurs continuously during this phase; mothers and their children will undergo important modifications, depending on the wider family environment, the school and other external forces. However, when children start the transition to secondary school, there is a major disruption to the established norms and practices of everyday life that have mostly formed part of the mother and child's shared world and relationships for the past 6-7 years. I would contend that the performance of motherhood must undergo change at this point, although it would not be a single moment of change and more of a gradual process. As the child is expected

⁴² There are various social situations for mothers to involve themselves with, such as taking part in the Parent Teacher Association, speaking to other parents at the school gates, taking their children to birthday parties or volunteering in the classroom. All of these aspects can form a community aspect to primary school life which mothers get involved with.

to grow more independent, mothers must refocus from the involved world of the primary school, where they are a valued and included individual, and move forward with their lives essentially devoid of many of these past responsibilities (Bowlby and Parkes 1970; Worden 1991).

It is my view that the mother must relocate her performance of motherhood away from being a primary school mother and begin to understand what it is like to parent from a distance – to perform motherhood as a secondary school mother, (as secondary schools require parents to do), as McMahon argues:

“it is important to understand what kind of identities are produced by separation, independence and autonomy.”

(McMahon 1995, p. 268)

Mothering from a distance creates a new set of performances for the mother, almost a type of redefinition in their relationships with their children and society and changes the way motherhood is performed⁴³. This will include many different facets, stages and approaches – although, whilst there are various formal support systems in place for the children undergoing the process, the mothers are bereft of formal support mechanisms (Schouten 1991, p. 49), or the understanding of society that they need in order to undergo their personal transitions. Although this suggests that, by performing intensive care work at secondary school transition, mothers enter into a

⁴³ An example of this might be travel to school. Whereas the primary school mother is expected to transport the child to the school door, maybe take them inside to deliver them safely and expect a form of affection when leaving, the performance of motherhood for the secondary school mother is quite different and may entail only reminding children that it is time to leave for school or ensuring that they have their school bag with them.

relational space where they are forced to re-evaluate their social positioning and performance of motherhood, it is an individual process and differs for everyone.

The mother is not the only person touched by going through the process (Fitz et al. 2002). The child, who is undergoing a significant transition of leaving the relatively safe and familiar world of primary school and entering the bigger, more complex, institution of the secondary school, will also undergo changes to their performance and the way in which they define themselves. This, in turn, is likely to impact the performance of motherhood as it changes and redefines the mother/child relationship. For children, the transition is placed firmly in the public domain; as a mother, it is a more private and invisible reconfiguration.

Summary

In this chapter, I have looked at how motherhood and becoming a mother is achieved by women and briefly considered how women are affected by it. I have argued that the transition to motherhood is a defining feature of a woman's life and something that affects them in various and far-reaching ways. I have concluded that motherhood performance is influenced and determined partly by their relationships with their children; in fact, I believe that the mother/child relationship is the key site of performativity. Having determined that the mother/child relationship is important, I have then moved on to consider the effects of various life transitions of the child on the mother's and concluded that, as mothers have such a strong investment in the primary to secondary transition, that this will arguably affect the way that motherhood is performed.

This and the previous chapter have provided an argument for the idea that the school choice process and the primary to secondary transition will have an effect on performance of motherhood. The following chapter sets out a methodology for investigating this topic for research.

Chapter 5

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter comprises four sections. Section one discusses a feminist post-structuralist position that accepts the existence of multiple, differing performativities. I discuss some cornerstones of feminist post-structuralist methodologies including narrative inquiry, the method used to conduct the research and a brief introduction to my story. The second section describes how I gathered and recorded the stories of the mothers; how they were recruited, who they were, the research process, the geographical position and the limits of the research. The third section discusses the issues of ethics, validity and the actions taken to prevent harm, reduce hierarchy, check accuracy and ensure privacy. The final section addresses how I transcribed, coded and analysed the data.

Research Objectives

The aim of the research was to collect, record, analyse, interpret and retell the stories of mothers who have engaged with the school choice process and explain the ways that engaging with the system has changed and impacted their performance of motherhood. The research objectives were refined after a pilot study and are as follows:

- 1) Consider how mothers engaged with the school choice process, specifically how mothers connected with the process and procedures surrounding school choice and the transition development.
- 2) Explore the experience of change in mothers in relation to the school choice process and the transition of their children, in reference to how they perform motherhood.
- 3) Understand whether these experiences are shared between mothers.

Section 1

Qualitative Research And Feminist Post-Structuralist Position

Qualitative research is designed to answer the whys and hows of human experience, thus discovering the quality of human phenomena, meanings and processes, in a way that represents and understands their socially constructed nature. It is concerned with exploring the rich knowledge of human lives and lived experience. Qualitative research is not value-free; rather, it is laden with the values and biases of the researcher – which, in themselves, are important to understand, and I hope to explain briefly here.

The rich information examined by qualitative research methods explains why it has been popular with feminist post-structuralist researchers as a valuable way of capturing the experiences of women in a postmodern world. It helps to gain insight into the world of women – getting at experiences and thoughts which often lay hidden and unarticulated. There exist multiple feminist perspectives, but I connect with the

feminist post-structuralist approach. This connection is because of how it relates to the performance of motherhood; challenging the modernist notion of there being one rational, direct self and championing the idea of women negotiating their performance of motherhood within the ever-changing and varied demands of today's fast-paced, relentless society. Feminist post-structuralism is, therefore, the theoretical framework that guides the study and is understood as:

"...a mode of knowledge production which uses Post-Structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social procedures and institutions to understand existing power relationships and to identify areas and strategies for change."

(Weedon 1997, p. 40-41)

This research centres around offering mothers an opportunity to tell their stories about the negotiation of the performance of motherhood, while engaging with a policy-driven education system. The post-structuralist focus on gender, power, discourse, voice, social construction and positionality harmonises with these objectives.

The particular power of the feminist post-structural approach, in application to the aims of this research, centres on the ways in which it provides potential explanation for performance. The feminist post-structuralist view of identity frames it as being multi-faceted, conflicted, fragmented and in a constant state of flux (Bloom 1998) and suggests that identity performance is formed by the public and private intersections of power, gender, race, class and sexual orientation (Tisdell 1998). Each speech and action sees the post-structural self taking up the discourses available and positioning

themselves accordingly (Luke 1992). By engaging in narrative and telling their stories, performativity becomes more visible, allowing for the reality that identity is performance.

The performance of identity is conceived here, not as something that creates an end product, but in line with feminist post-structural theory (discussed in Chapter 2), and as a continuous process. I would argue that the dynamics of engaging with the school choice process, and the multiple discourses and positionalities surrounding it, actually provide a catalyst for the performance of motherhood. Furthermore, that the process of adjusting and coping with new situations and the resulting crises of self-knowledge opens up new spaces for performance both in consciousness and practice.

Research Method: Narrative Inquiry And Interview

To address the topic in question and to understand how the performance of motherhood changes due to engagement with the school choice process, I adopted a narrative inquiry method, specifically narrative as story, using unstructured interviews to collect the data. Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling; these are then produced into a story of a person's lived experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that we are storytelling organisms who individually and collectively lead storied lives; this, they argue, is essentially human. Narrative inquiry is one way of knowing and understanding these stories and, therefore, getting close to the lived experience of the participants.

Narrative inquiry is an apt method to investigate the performance of motherhood during the school choice process, because the situation in question, although effectively open-ended, is considered to be a process with a distinct beginning, middle and end. Therefore, it suits investigation, which utilises the way in which human beings organise sequential events around the central theme of a plot to create a story. Stories are the central method by which individuals form, reform and communicate themselves (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992). The relationship between stories and the performance of motherhood will be useful to me as a focus for my research and a suitable way of understanding the process of performance in the mothers.

Stories are a special type of discourse production (Polkingthorne 2007) that include conversations about the world around the plot, which act as its thematic thread. Stories are also embedded within our existing cognitive structures and, therefore, should be a natural way for mothers to disclose information about the school choice process (Kemper 1984). It should allow mothers to tell their stories in their own words, illuminating things that they may not have thought of before and creating social reality through the language that they chose to use. The lived social reality of the mothers I interviewed and narrative analysis utilised, has allowed me to access the mothers' own perspectives on their terms (Denzin 1989; Robertson and Boyle 1984). Stories are also inclusive; they are a recognisable feature of all cultures, and this allows all women to take part in research with methodology they understand and can relate to, which is important to me.

Stories also can weave emotion seamlessly into the explanations of situations and critical events they illustrate. Some forms of positivist methodology and even some

qualitative methods have tended to drain emotion away from their explanations of the topics being investigated. However, stories retain rich emotional complexity and use linguistic expression to bring forth emotion and the uniquely human experience of interconnectedness (Ricoeur 1990, 1992). Therefore, stories are also the most available source of knowledge about people's innermost thoughts and feelings, and they offer them up every day. It is my belief that creating and retelling a story brings the experiences back to the surface, allowing the storyteller to visualise and remember the thoughts, feelings and actions of the time. Thus narrative inquiry and the storied process has a stronger emotional content than many other methods. It is on the understanding that stories form the basis of a purposeful contribution to understanding the research objectives that led to its adoption as the research method.

Section 2

Research Design And Process

Research Process/Recruitment Of Mothers

The research proposal was put into the Ethics Review Panel, and after clarifying points surrounding recruitment and debriefing, ethical approval was gained. The recruitment of mothers was done in several ways. In the geographical area in which the research was being carried out, four secondary schools and six primary schools were approached and asked whether they would assist in the recruitment of mothers. The schools were first approached by letter (Appendix A and B) and were then followed up by a telephone call. Overall, five schools offered to help, and they did this by sending out the research recruitment advertisement (Appendix C) to the parents.

All but two of the schools sent this out via their electronic 'Parentmail' system. If the communication was being made by the primary school, they sent it out to all of the mothers of Year 6 children while, for secondary schools, it was sent out to mothers of Year 7, 8 and 9 children. The mothers who were interested in taking part in the research then contacted me via email, telephone or text. Once communication was established, the participants were given more information on the study in the form of the information Sheet and letter (Appendix D and E) and were then invited to get back in touch if they felt they still wanted to take part or ask any further questions. Two mothers were recruited by other mothers who had already taken part.

Overall, 38 women came forward to ask for more information about the research and, out of them, 15 were interviewed. Of the 38 women who came forward, 23 did not want to continue with the research or be interviewed. The reduction in numbers came from a series of discussions about what would happen in the research, clarifying the information that would need to be given and working out logistics; for example, some women were unable to find the time to be interviewed.

Once the women were recruited, had read the information sheets and were happy that all of their questions had been answered, there was a process of negotiation about time and place for the interview. All of the women were asked to choose a place in which they felt safe and comfortable to be interviewed. The interviews were all carried out locally to the women. Overall, seven interviews were carried out in cafés, three in public houses, one in a hotel lobby, two over the telephone and two in one of the respondent's home (this was a joint interview and was carried out at home to allow for the care of a small baby). There were some issues with carrying out the

interviews in these environments; firstly, some of the locations were noisy, and this resulted in the taped interviews being harder to transcribe. Secondly, there were sometimes other disturbances, such as mobile phones and televisions in these locations. However, these issues did not impede the interviews, and they were all carried out successfully.

How the interviews were carried out

Once I had introduced myself, I then gave the women copies of the information sheet, clarified any questions and asked them to fill in a personal data form and the consent form. At this point, I asked whether the women were comfortable with the interviews being tape-recorded; all agreed that they were. For telephone interviews, the documents were emailed, and the personal data form was filled in over the phone; the women were asked if they were comfortable with the interview being recorded and both were.

To obtain the data, I explained how the interview would work. This process was more refined in the later interviews, as I made my interview technique more efficient by learning how to elicit stories from the participants; each in-depth interview lasted between 50 mins to 3 hours. I told each participant that, for the first part of the interview, I would sit back and listen to their story about how their child or children transitioned from primary to secondary school. Then I would follow up with some questions which came out of the initial story to clarify some points and follow up some themes that had arisen. I used a series of guiding questions during the interviews to help with structure; these questions were developed during the pilot

study and refined in evaluation. The guiding questions can be found in (Appendix F). I transcribed the interview tapes for analysis.

Geographical location and limits

To guarantee that the mothers were all dealing with the same/similar experience, I restricted the research to a small case study. The location studied was a rural area of East Anglia. Using a small geographical location allowed the educational market in the area, and the school choice process to be the same for all the women interviewed and therefore allow comparisons to be made.

In total, there are 5 secondary schools within 10 miles, 10 within 15 miles and 30 within 20 miles of the town taken as the centre point of the research, Wheatmill. Seven of these schools are independent fee-paying schools. The schools are described in the table below:

Table 5.1: Characteristics of the primary schools involved in the research

School Name	Location	Description	Feeder for:
Shepherds Peck	Waymill	Small village primary. 220 pupils on roll	Winsrich, Beechaven, Richberg
Corfort	Blackmeadow	Medium town primary. 500 on roll	Richberg

Newdell	Wheatmill	Medium town primary. 500 on roll	Winsrich
Crampton	Wheatmill	Medium town primary. 400 on roll	Winsrich
Fallwyn	Fallwyn	Small village primary school. 120 on roll	Winsrich, Beechaven, Richberg

Table 5.2: Characteristics of the secondary schools involved in the research

School Name	Location	Description
Vertlea	Greenfay	Large town community secondary. 2000 on roll
Goldfall	Goldfall	Private boarding and day school. Rural location. 1000 on roll
Beechaven	Deephall	Large community secondary. Rural location, small town. 1300 on roll
Richberg	Blackmeadow	Large secondary academy. Medium size town. 1700 on roll
Winsrich	Wheatmill	Medium size community school. Small town. 1100 on roll
Baysburgh	Werlington	Medium size secondary school. Rural location. 1000 on roll

Winsford	Freyton	Small secondary school. Rural location. 700 on roll
Knoxford	Otsdale	Large state boarding school. Rural location. 2000 on roll
Clifton	Westview	Medium independent school. City centre location. 600 on roll
Pramlingay	Westview	Medium independent school. City centre location. 800 on roll
Chatford	Chatford	Small state boarding school. Small town location. 700 on roll
Werlington	Werlington	Small independent school. Town location. 500 on roll

The area of East Anglia may be unique because the rural nature of the environment means that the secondary schools are rarely oversubscribed, resulting in choice (based on admission numbers) being a real factor in this location. As a result, competition for places is rare. Of the 30 secondary schools in the area, 15 of these still had places left after offer day in March 2015; three of these were the secondary schools serving the centre town of the research, namely Wheatmill. However, schools in this area are not considered as good (based on league table results and Ofsted inspections) as those in neighbouring towns to which transport links are available. Within travelling distance, there also features an extensive range of Independent schools, which increases the choice options for some parents. There are also a handful of faith schools which are an option for some.

Who Are The Mothers?

Table 5.3: Summary Of Participants' Details

Name	Age	No. of children	Marital status	Employment status	Highest education level	Type of school attended
Amelia	45	2	Married	Stay at home parent	A-level equivalent	State school
Angie	40	2	Married	Full time employed	GCSE	State school
Caroline	43	1	Married	Full time employed	PGCE	State school
Deb	45	3	Married	Self employed	Bachelors degree	State school
Hannah	39	2	Married	Full time employed	Masters degree	State school
Liz	47	3	Divorced	Full time employed	GCSE	State school
Stella	36	3	Single	Part time employed	GCSE	State school
Lucy	42	2	Married	Full time employed	Diploma	State school
Marie	53	5	Married	Full time employed	Bachelors degree	State school
Mosa	46	3	Living apart together	Full time employed	Higher degree	Independent school
Rayna	44	2	Married	Full time employed	HND	State grammar school

Rowyn	37	1	Married	Full time employed	Diploma	State school
Sabine	43	2	Married	Full time employed	GCSE	State Catholic school
Scarlett	46	2	Married	Full time employed	GCSE	State school
Sophie	48	2	Divorced	Stay at home parent	A-level	State school

All the interviews took place between December 2013 and October 2014. The women were all local to the geographical area described above. The women's mean age was 43.8 years, with a mean of 2.3 children per woman. Of the mothers interviewed, 80% of them were married or living with a partner, with 3 mothers being divorced or single. Short pen portraits of all of these women can be found in Appendix (H)

Section 3

Ethical Considerations/Actions And Validity

Ethics

Inevitably, a research methodology which is, by definition, so personal and embedded within sensitive social, political and cultural complexities is going to have ethical issues. I have been able to identify some of the problems and some of the ways in which I minimised these during the research process; however, as narrative inquiry is a method, which evolves and develops, it is possible that other issues may have arisen.

Narrative inquiry is person-centered and, therefore, unapologetically subjective. The raw relationship between the mothers and the method, with little mitigation in between, raises the issue of the vulnerability of the mothers. The mothers are effectively laying bare their stories to a group of readers for whom they will not have the ability to talk to, correct misunderstandings or defend actions – in a sense; their stories are frozen in a time, place and context. Although the way in which the stories are written up will never be (and could never be) a neutral representation of the story presented (my approach to narrative inquiry is not to be a ‘disembodied omniscient narrator claiming universal and attempted general knowledge’, Richardson and St. Peirre 2005, p. 961), the stories, as presented should be able to relay any emotions, strength of feeling, cognitions and human action applied to the situations. Therefore, the mothers are relying on the write-up to treat them fairly and preserve the worth and dignity of the storylines being entrusted (Lincoln and Guba 1986). It is my responsibility to present the stories as they were told and to maintain their subjectivity, I transcribed, coded and present the stories in their rawest possible form, to ensure that I do not overbear the stories with my voice, thus preserving the dignity in which they were told.

Furthermore, strong emphasis has to be placed on creating a relationship of trust between the participants and myself and balancing the power relationship by making the rapport as collaborative as possible, rather than one of knowledgeable researcher and information-giving participant. Whether a true balance can ever be sustained is arguable since, as the researcher, I have chosen which stories to tell and which to reject (Emihovich 2005); as a result, it will be clear to participants that the process of

research ends and I will essentially leave the scene (Emihovich 2005), departing in a position which is changed from whence I entered. To try and maximise the relationship with the participants, I had several email and telephone conversations with the mothers before I met them. I did this to allow a rapport to build and to make them feel comfortable in giving me the information; also, I was open and honest about my reasons for doing the research. I have not left the scene, as many mothers did come back after their interviews to tell me other things, or ask questions, and I have left the door open to them; which has enabled a more collaborative approach. Packwood and Sikes (1996) suggest that a collaborative research relationship allows the focus to be on the person, their feelings and emotions and helps to balance any perceived power relationships during the research process. The process of building the relationship and trust with participants is difficult and time-consuming, I consider this was critical to the success of the research and took time to achieve. What problematises this is my experiential position as a mother of children going through or recently having negotiated the school choice process – I am essentially in the field and a member of the landscape (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). The process of reaching inter-subjectivity with the participants will inevitably cause significant reflectivity and self-awareness on my part and is a noteworthy point as it can enrich my interpretation of the text and the whole process of the research. However, I have been cautious in negotiating any self-indulgence that the research may bring and have been constantly aware of decentralising my story and have prevented pushing those of the participants into the margin (Edwards and Ribbens 1998). This approach is not foolproof, and inevitably some of my own story will be evident through the process and the analysis. Inherent in this relationship is issues of control and, therefore, power. I, as the researcher, have chosen to give voice to certain women. However, that

voice may well be accompanied by a lack of control by the participants in that they have little or no control over these factors, but this then changes the balance of power and the possibilities of a fully collaborative relationship. I feel this point is critically significant to the research and I have handled this sensitively. I agree with Gready's (2004) assertion that voice without control may be worse than silence, and the mothers who did not choose to give voice to their stories exist by their silence.

Related to creating trust, is the role of giving support to the participants and how far this should go. I am not a therapist, but I am aware that the potential cathartic nature of storytelling may well raise unwelcome issues that participants will need to deal with outside of the research. It was critical that I ensured the right support structures were in place to help mothers if anything did arise. I referred several mothers back to their secondary school and local authority to deal with questions that arose, and this seemed to be helpful.

Regarding Issues of privacy and consent, the participants will have given truly informed consent via discussion and consent forms to take part in the research and will have taken the journey with me. However, this does not eliminate the possibility that there may be some intrusion felt when the stories are publicised. A more pressing point is that narrative inquiry is a social activity, connecting us to other people, events and situations (Stanley 1993). So, what about people mentioned in the stories, who have not given their consent? Could they face an intrusion of privacy? I have taken all reasonable steps to prevent the identification of mothers, schools and other individuals who have been mentioned, but this is not something that I will ever be able to remove completely. All of the mothers I interviewed were informed, both

verbally and in writing, that they could withdraw themselves or their data from the research at any time without consequence.

Emihovich (2003) reflects on using the data collected about other people's lives in the pursuance of science and knowledge. Essentially the stories that are being told are already interpreted by the participants; I am then reinterpreting this – double hermeneutic (Giddens 1987). The question of interpretation reflects the morality of narrative inquiry and the stories it collects. Many commentators have questioned the moral purpose of stories (Polkingthorne 1995) and, therefore, there are some issues that this raises for my research. Firstly, who owns the work? The stories belong to the participants; they are personal and contextually bound. However, once interpreted and analysed, who then owns them and their potentially transformative power? I will assume a position of privilege and power as I access these stories and interpret them. I may be viewed as having access to some sense of truth through their interpretation – I see the ownership of the stories remaining with the mothers who provided them and the interpretation as mine. However, I have made sure that the mothers understood that their data belonged to them.

Another element to consider is the issue of voice. Narrative inquiry, like many other qualitative methods, can be used to subvert the political and cultural biases introduced and maintained by other methods (Ball and Goodson 1985). The group of women I am seeking to study can be a silent and under-represented group in the school choice process. Giving voice to these women empowers them, and Sparkes (1994) argues that this then becomes a political act. I would argue that, by making the personal narrative public, will give the women power, but it doesn't have to be

politicised. Seeking a course of action that politicises the stories carries a risk that those who I am seeking to give voice to may, in fact, be harmed in that process and that is something I have avoided at all costs. The mothers were all informed that they could refuse to answer any questions or refuse to provide information if they chose to.

Trust And Validity

The issues of validity, reliability and replicability cannot be rejected out of hand for this type of narrative research. While some apply more readily than others, it is issues of validity, which are most concerning.

Issues of validity are no more relevant to studies of narrative inquiry than they are to those of quantitative origin. All researchers, regardless of their position or epistemological view, need to develop arguments to persuade readers that their knowledge claims are valid (Polkingthorne 2007). This may often be more difficult with narrative inquiry as the terms 'stories' or 'story' tend to hold negative connotations aligned more to fiction than to social science from the outset (Polkingthorne 2007).

The approach to validation with narrative inquiry is based around the rhetorical devices of argumentativeness rather than a mechanical approach surrounding graphs, statistics and correlation coefficients. I believe there are two core areas of validation evidence that I have sought to back up my knowledge claims – persuasiveness and fidelity. I have used the narratives and their resulting interpretation to persuade readers of their plausibility. Backing up claims with evidence in the narratives

(quotes, themes, etc.) and making the narrative appeal to the reader, using contextualization (McGuire 1990) has been possible, the aim being to locate particular instances or concepts within the wider social context, which has also helped to identify more general notions.

Fidelity is another way in which I have sought to validate my knowledge claims.

Fidelity, according to Blumenfeld-Jones (1995: pg. 26), is distinct from truth in that truth is 'what happened in the situation', whereas fidelity is 'what it means to the teller of the tale'. Fidelity is, therefore, by definition subjective and has links to the moral undertones of narrative inquiry. Blumenfeld-Jones (1995, p.27) defines fidelity as 'the act of faithfulness and integrity on the part of the researcher to preserve the worth and dignity of the teller'. Fidelity can be achieved by 'accurately chronicling events while arranging them into a meaningful and believable story' (Moss 2004, p. 6). Providing a true and accurate account of the story was something that drove the analysis process, and I hope to have preserved the fidelity of the stories through this process.

Section 4

Transcription, Coding And Analysis

All of the interviews were transcribed in full. There were 13 individual interviews and one joint interview with two mothers. All personal identifying names, names of geographical locations and names of individual schools have been replaced and are consistent throughout the transcripts.

I began the coding process with open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). To do this, I read through the transcripts noting my thoughts, ideas, reactions and identifying any trends or similarities in the mothers' stories. I used coloured highlighters and lifted individual parts/speech/quotes of the transcriptions into a separate document where similarities/differences occurred. After the initial readings, I summarised the main themes that had emerged from the text, which amounted to over 24. I then re-read the transcripts several times to add to the themes and noted synergies with the literature and again comparisons between the stories. I then was able to reduce the initial 24 themes into three umbrella themes: space/materialities, relationships and emotions. With these themes defined, I then went back and re-read all the transcripts, highlighting areas that fit into the three major themes (and anything else that was outstanding and didn't fit), developing sub-themes, adding supporting comments/quotes and my interpretation of these.

Table Of Themes

The following tables show the themes which arose from the analysis:

Table 5.4: List Of Subthemes Space And Practices

Space	Priorities	Negative factors preventing a choice	The assumption of the local	Identity
	Size of school	Space/domestic space and the wider family	The ambivalent transition	It was easy to do
	Travel to school	The experience of space and choice	Right to a local education	Letting go
	Friendships	Isolation through not being local		Strategic chooser as performance
	Family ties			
	Facilities			

Table 5.5: List Of Subthemes Relationships

Relationships expressed	
Mother's relationships with other people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other mothers • Primary school • Secondary school • Authority/professionals • Partners/significant other 	Mother's relationship with the transition child
Mother's relationship with the wider family	Mothers relationship with society
Mother's view on themselves	

Table 5.6: List Of Subthemes Emotions

Emotions expressed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Happiness/relief
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pride
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety including worry and nerves/nervousness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My child is different
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worry about whether I have made the right choice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grief/loss
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accepting someone different
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Judgment

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed issues within feminist post-structuralist qualitative research and provided a justification for my use of narrative inquiry. I have described how I recruited the mothers that I interviewed. I have described how I gathered the stories and how the interviews were conducted and have aimed to show how I took account of ethical and validation issues. I have also outlined how I transcribed and coded the interviews. In the next three chapters, I provide an analysis of the main themes that have emerged through the interviews and how these work together. These themes are: space and practices, relationships and emotions.

Chapter 6

Analysis Of Findings: Space And Practices

The next three chapters provide an analysis and discussion of the three major themes that emerged from the mothers' stories. The first chapter discusses mothers' experiences of space and practices as they engage with the school choice process. The focus falling on the more practical issues of school choice and how these intersect with the qualitative judgments mothers make. In the second chapter, I explore some of the relationships between and within the mothers and how challenge, change and anxieties come to bear during this time. The final analysis chapter looks at the role of emotion in the performance of motherhood and the school choice process. The ideas of change, performance and motherhood are pervasive throughout the findings.

Part 1: Space and practices

The theme of space, is one of the dominant themes to arise from the analysis of the women's stories and focuses on the materialities of the environment in which the women and their families operated. In essence, it considers the ways that mothers organise and managed the spaces in which they lived, worked and were educated in. The materialities concerned are the physical structures: things and objects in the spaces the women inhabited, also, it takes into consideration the environmental and human characteristics of space, location, distance and how these spaces are perceived, structured, organised and managed. The materiality of place shapes the lived experience of the women and their families and reaches into the social, cultural and personal areas of the women's lives.

The process of school choice was designed to introduce a market into secondary school choice, and this was to ensure the best schools survived, and parents had free choice. However, the policy did not account for the role that residential space and practices would play in its application. Space was an important part of the school choice process for the mothers interviewed and is a critical factor in choice, mainly because it forces parents to choose a school by first selecting a place of residence (Allen and Burgess 2010). Selection of school is not a choice made freely by many, as income, employment and family ties can all affect these decisions. Residential space initially determines the range of schools available and the practical factors involved (such as transport, school size and urban vs. rural). As lower performing schools tend to be clustered together, families need to make significant changes to geographical location to ensure access to better secondary schools (Rich and Jennings 2015). Practices of family and space also have a great deal of impact on choice and research has shown that choice takes place within a social network of friends, family members and other obligations leading to constraints on choice from the start (Eekelaar 2012, Eekelaar 2006).

The space and practices analyses below, show that the choices being made by the women and their families were not occurring in a vacuum and that freedom of choice was affected in different ways. The women show that all choices were made with negotiation, which the women were aware of and engaged with. This theme looks at the **things** which effect school choice, and the following themes will look at the **people** who affect school choice. It is important here to draw a distinction between some of the previous research on school choice and how it relates to space and the

results of this research. Previous research by David et al. 1994 notes that parents often gave 'proximity' along with 'school performance' and 'pleasant feel' as the main reasons for choosing a school. The factor of 'proximity' in relation to the closeness of the school was not a finding of this research, and none of the mothers mentioned this as a factor per se. Rather, they expressed space in a different way; how it related to loyalty, the child's independence and their rights to a local education. Therefore this research has not confirmed David et al. 1994 findings of proximity being a factor for these mothers. I believe that the mothers manifested space in a more psychological way rather than purely physical, possibly because of the lack of competition in the market and the importance of the local community, and that is why the importance of proximity contrasted with this research.

Table 5.4 : Analysis Space And Practices Subthemes And Subcategories

Space	Priorities	Negative factors preventing a choice	The assumption of the local	Identity
	Size of school	Space/domestic space and the wider family	The ambivalent transition	It was easy to do
	Travel to school	The experience of space and choice	Right to a local education	Letting go
	Friendships	Isolation through not being local		Strategic chooser as performance
	Family ties			
	Facilities			

The table above shows the four subthemes which arose from the analysis of the theme of space and the sub-categories.

Priorities

One of the dominant themes to come out of the research was that of mothers determining a sense of priorities for their child, and their chosen secondary school. The mothers were open about having a list of priorities for their child, and these priorities often directed the choice of school. Research shows that it requires significant time and effort to collect and process information on the schools in the choice process (Ball and Vincent 1998, Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995, Ball and Vincent 2001). However, not everyone collects the same information in the same way (Leroux 2015). Middle-class mothers, defined as those who are well educated with strong social contacts and financial position (Savage et al. 2013) tend to have different priorities when looking at secondary schools and value information on performance and peer group, whereas those of lower socioeconomic status tend to look for information relating to friendliness of staff, accessibility and support for those of lower ability (Allen, Burgess and McKenna 2013). This research supports the emergence of priorities as an important factor and confirms its place as a theme and therefore supporting the research above in that it shows that different groups have different priorities for their children.

Size Of School

The size of school was something that mothers prioritised in their stories. There were many references to it both regarding the large size of the secondary schools and in comparison to the small size of the primary schools. It is worth noting that both primary schools and secondary schools in England have increased in size over the last 50 years. Primary and secondary schools grow and shrink cyclically with need, but overall there has been a 21% decline in the number of primary schools and a 32% reduction in the number of secondary schools in this time. The average English primary school has between 180-220 students, and the average English secondary school has around 950. The cohort of schools mothers referenced in this research had average pupil numbers of 348 pupils for primary school and 1033 for the secondary schools – therefore being slightly above the national averages noted. State secondary schools have been getting bigger to respond to changes in population, and a report in 2015 showed plans nationally in 17 local councils to increase pupil numbers to over 2000 in many secondary schools to cope with demand (TES 2015). Consequently, schools are growing, and it is not unreasonable for the size of school to have been an area of concern for the mothers.

Size of school is not something that appears in the literature as a priority for choosing secondary schools and may be something related to the comparatively isolated geographical area of the research. It is, however, something which is referred to in the primary school literature and the mothers in this research talked about the small size and place of the primary school in the local community and their lives with some fondness. Forsythe (1984), Valentine (1997) and Little & Austin (1996) have all

referred to the symbolic nature of the local village primary school as being linked to the perception of the rural idyll. Meanwhile, an LGA report in 2000 suggested that the village primary school is perceived as being better quality and more able to include those with special needs because of their small size. The fondness of the primary school is the experience expressed by many of the mothers in their stories, who experienced small village primary schools.

The mothers in this study were aware of the large size of the secondary schools that their children would attend and the perceived effects that these would have, although they tended to refer to them in a negative way. This awareness was evident in Stella, Rowyn and Sophie's comments on school size:

...So we've got the little goldfish who got sent into the piranha pool, and they had to wing it (Stella)

.... my personal opinion is that Richburg is just too big (Rowyn)

.... when I looked around the school I was overwhelmed by the sheer size (Sophie)

These quotes express how the mothers perceived size in a negative way, though their comments represented their opinion rather than their children's. The size of the secondary school was viewed by many as negative because of the comparative size of the primary schools they had experienced and the value that the mothers placed on this:

... I think it's just the smallness and the closeness of the primary school (Rayna)

... Dovedale primary uhm which is obviously a fairly small school (Rowyn)

These mothers talked with some affection for the small nature of the primary school and how it gave a sense of community and closeness that a secondary school would not, therefore supporting what other research had identified (Forsythe 1984, Valentine 1997 and Little & Austin 1996). Sabine had even moved to a small village from London to give her children the experience of the village primary school as she valued this:

... we felt that being in a village and them all going to the village school they would have quite a nice start in life really (Sabine)

The movement from a small, safe primary school to a large secondary school seemed to engender a sense of loss in some mothers; they felt that they would be losing something of their child and themselves as the child disappeared into the faceless masses of secondary school. The sense of loss is especially significant as the mothers put in such a huge amount of emotional energy and labour at transfer and beyond (O'Brien 2005):

... when you get up to the high school, and they don't give a monkeys because you're just a statistic, you're a number (Stella)

Stella's comments here confirm O'Brien's (2005) findings and develop to express how a mother may feel when this emotional energy and care is ignored.

Travel

Travel from home to school is important and at the centre of a complex set of inter-related issues, which concern family structures, town planning, educational policy, etc. (Ferrari and Green 2013). Changes to the spatial configuration of school and urban spaces (particularly the move to bigger secondary schools with wider catchment areas, surburbinization and parental choice in education), accompanied by other social factors such as dual working families, car ownership, relative affluence in many areas, school choice, accumulative concerns about child safety and increased parental surveillance have led to travel to school becoming a very visible issue. All of these factors combine to increase home to school travel distance for children in secondary school, with it nearly doubling from just under 2 miles in 1980 to 3.7 miles in 2013 (Department of Transport 2013). Alongside the increase in distance, there has also been a change in the way that children are transported to schools, in 1975/76, 55% of secondary school children walked independently to school, in 2012 this figure had dropped to 38%, accompanied by a rise of 19% who were transported by car. Some home to school travel is independent, but the local authority provides transportation also. Local authorities are implementing policy which has changed little since 1944 regarding home to school transport. Local authorities spent £1 billion in 2009-2010 on transporting children from home to school, although a significant amount of this is spent on those with SEN, it still accounts for 2-3% of total local authority budget.

All of these reasons can limit or increase choice for families because of their housing situation, financial position, local authority transport provision and working status. Therefore, it is not a surprise that issues of travel to school was important in all of the mother's stories. The issues surrounded both the actual feature of travelling to school and other subcategories such as cost of travel, safety of travel and the independence a child gets from travelling to school on their own. In terms of travel to school, the area examined provided free bus transport for those in the outlying villages with the remainder of children being able to walk to school.⁴⁴

...it's only a ten-minute bus ride to either of the local secondary schools, so really the kids were not going to have any problems with travel (Amelia)

...the village that we live in,(sic), there is a school bus that comes to the village every day and takes them there and drops them back again in the afternoon and that actually is all paid for (Sabine)

From the quotes above, it is clear that many of the mothers did experience travel to secondary school as a positive thing. This is supported by research from the British Attitudes Survey which, in 2011, suggested that 8 out of 10 parents thought they would send their children to their local school because it would make travel the easiest option. For many, travel was a defining issue in the school choice process and something that outlined their options:

⁴⁴ This was fairly standard with the criteria being as follows:

- live within the local area
- be registered at his or her designated school
- 3 miles (secondary) from their school
- be able to complete the journey in less 1 hour 15 minutes (secondary)

...we would have maybe looked at Vertleq, but it was the logistics of getting him there. I couldn't have got there and to Winsrich [where she worked] and there wouldn't have been a bus from here (Scarlett)

Scarlett's experience of having her choice limited by travel and her working patterns was a theme running through many of the interviews. It is also something, which is experienced outside very urban areas, where public transport is limited (Allen, Burgess and McKenna 2013), representing a spatial constriction on choice. Many of the mothers interviewed worked full-time and, therefore, felt limited in their ability to get their child to the right school. They felt restricted in getting their child to an 'adequate' school by picking the easier transport options:

...it was silly to try and logistically get her to a school that was further away and have to arrange the transport and everything when we have a perfectly acceptable school, where all of that would be a lot easier and taken care of really (Sabine)

The logistical challenges means the child may not be placed in the most appropriate school for their needs, and research suggests that this can have a negative impact on examination performance (Thomas and Mortimore 1994).

Where children were not able to walk to school or get a free bus, the cost of travel was an important factor, mostly for those on lower incomes. Research has calculated that the average parent spends £7.29 per week on getting their child to school and that many parents pay more (Brunwin et al. 2004). The cost of transport may appear small

to some. However, it is an extra cost on moving to secondary schools that many parents may not be able to afford. Cost was not always something that prevented mothers placing their children in schools that incurred transport cost, but it was something that they considered:

...I think Beechaven would have been my second choice, but then it's buses and it's up much earlier and there is an additional cost (Deb)

...So it was a constant worry, I mean she was too little to be going, so I paid for the bus, a safe way of getting them to school. Very costly. (Liz)

Cost of travel has the potential to further reduce the choice of school for a family and restrict a mother's role outside of the home, and the two quotes above reflect how this affected their performance of motherhood.

Safety was also an issue that came up and affected not only the decisions made about schools but also had an impact on the way that mothers felt about the transition:

...I wasn't keen on him taking the school bus and I know that there is a lot of bullying that goes on (Scarlett)

...Oh, definitely, the mother in me wanted her walking home with people, 12 kids in a group, not cycling across town on her own in the dark. (Caroline)

...we had another incident where she was walking home from school and a boy picked up some stones which were pebbles from someone's drive and threw them at her (Sophie)

It is not surprising that safety came up often and was linked to the way that mothers felt about performing motherhood (i.e. being a good mother). Not only are there many stories in the media about accidents and tragedies that befall children on the way to/from school, which raise awareness of real safety concerns (road safety), but also those of moral panics (kidnap, etc.) created by the media. Although it is worth noting that the research area was very safe and travel to school was not a major risk for the mothers or children concerned. While some saw the independence linked to their children getting themselves to school as being a release, others felt it difficult to allow their children to become independent in this way and face their diminishing/changing responsibilities as a mother:

...the worst experience was knowing that he had to travel so far, you want to be there for your child all the time and putting him on two buses every day to get to school was really daunting for me, I suppose, ermm that part of that was feeling that I couldn't send him to the local school, which made me cross. I was losing a part of my son and some of the control I had over his upbringing because the schools around me locally were bad (Angie)

Another key issue mentioned was about the independence of the child and how travel became a core part of this process for mothers, which is something found in the literature (Valsecchi et al. 2007; Hillman 1993). Some of the mothers looked towards secondary school as a time where children should be starting to become more

independent of their mothers and travel was a part of that as it affected their performance of motherhood and redefined what motherhood was. Angie below commented on the benefits of her son having a longer commute to school:

...I probably wouldn't have let him grow up so much, it would have been tempting to like, pick him up from school and stuff, but this way he has just grown up. (Angie)

Many of the mothers understood the importance of the decisions they were making. However, from the way in which they discussed them, it was clear they were 'allowing' and 'controlling' it (Headicar 2009):

...Even things like walking to school on your own, you know, actually the school was further away from where the primary school was and you know that is a big decision for a parent, to suddenly allow your child to walk halfway across the town (Deb)

...I mean at secondary you are aware that there are parents in their cars collecting and I wanted to do that, but they could walk home (Lucy)

Considering the rural location and relative safety of the location, many of the mothers had some difficulty letting go of their children:

...I have thought about letting him walk to school on his own, I mean it's only five minutes away, but haven't done it yet maybe, I will do it next year (Amelia)

Because of the limited geographical range of the mothers, they all experienced the practical aspects of travel to school in a relatively consistent way. It can, therefore, be considered a common theme in the research, even though the way in which it was experienced differed.

Friendships

Of the 15 mothers interviewed as part of the research, 10 of them were concerned about the friendships of their children during the transition and mentioned how friendships became part of their decision-making:

...I thought it was important for her to be with most of her friends (Caroline)

...it does mean that if Bennett is making friendships that they are going to be local (Deb)

... they are all going to Winsrich, apart from one of his friends (Marie)

... for them to be happy and in order for that to take place, they really wanted to go where their friends were going, so that was another big consideration to take, to take on board really (Sabine)

It is evident from these statements that the mothers believed that friendships were a large factor in the child's happiness and, therefore, to their success and performance as a mother. There were some more negative comments about friendships, sometimes where children were not going to the local school and were leaving friends behind:

...I could tell it made him a bit sad, he is going lose his best friend through this process and it all made me feel a bit guilty really (Hannah)

In addition, the mothers also made comment about leaving behind a community of friends themselves in the transition. Not that choice was a big part of this issue, but mothers frequently referred to leaving the community of primary school behind:

... and listening to the other mums, finding out what was going on I suppose, being part of the wider community (Scarlett)

...you used to stand at the school gates and have a chat for five minutes before you picked your child up (Sophie)

Scarlett and Sophie both felt the child's transition acutely, and the changes that it brought about in their lives, and this seemed to be a key difference in the way they performed motherhood.

Family Ties

During the interviews, the mothers made references to family ties and the effects that these had on their choices. The burden of care for their children, the wider family and other relatives, frequently falls on female members of the family. As Lynch (2007) points out, care is not an optional value in society and, whether people subscribe to it or respect it, their very existence depends upon it. The sub-theme of family illustrates

the issues of 'stickiness' for many of the mothers concerned. Family represented for many a form of structure, boundaries and restriction which tends to characterise stickiness (Costas 2013). Although some of the mothers were not (or did not perceive) themselves as spatially bounded, others seemed stuck in place by many factors – family being one of the most notable, and this will be considered in the following chapter on relationships. While place seemed important to many, the issue of stickiness mediated how these women perceived their choices and how they inhabited space (Allen and Hollingworth 2013). Family was not the only stickiness issue to arise; there were other factors such as work, socio-economic status and social class evident in the mothers' stories. While these mothers talked clearly about what physical factors may have increased stickiness, they did not express much negativity to these factors or talk about increasing the mobility for them or their children. While some of these women were happy to negotiate the challenges of space and stickiness others were less able or not motivated to do so. While in part this may be due to the rural location of the research, other issues were in play.

Some of the mothers made reference of being 'stuck' in a certain location because of their wider families:

...But we are stuck here, we can't move because of my dad (Amelia)

...No, I couldn't leave here, I've got good friends and neighbours, I couldn't leave here.

This is my support group. I've only got my dad, the only reason I haven't left this town is because my father never went and, because he's here, I'm here (Stella)

These mothers recognised that wider family ties were preventing them from making the choices they would have ideally made for their children, showing that the 'good mother' narrative is fighting against the 'practical mother' narrative. This is especially relevant when considering women's often dual burden of looking after the younger and older generations at the same time, with the pressure of both roles affecting the way that motherhood was performed. Both Amelia and Stella noted that they had to think about another member of their family when considering school choice and that these responsibilities constricted their choice – although it is worthy of note that there was no animosity attached to this, more of a practical resignation to the reality of the situation.

Although these conflicting responsibilities could be causing inner turmoil in the mother, there is an assumption by society of hyper-responsible parenting or responsibilisation (Lister 2003a, Gewirtz 1995), which places the moral burden on the mother to produce future citizens and police themselves in doing so. The vast majority of the responsibility falls to the mother (Gillies 2005, 2007), who then assumes the developmental and psychoanalytic role of 'do it all' motherhood for her children (Cain 2009). This all produces a sense of near obsessive mothering with a moral imperative to produce well-rounded, successful and adaptable individuals (Lister 2003b; Warner 2005) who can operate in society. But for mothers who are not able to do this, who are looking after older parents, younger siblings, working full-time, etc., the pressure is enormous and expressed in the stories of these mothers through guilt:

...[I feel] guilty I suppose, but I am not beating myself up over it, it's what has happened and he will be okay at Winsrich. I can't really do any more and I have done my best as his mum (Amelia)

It was not just older family members that made an appearance in the choice process of the mothers. There were also other children who stopped choice being open or, indeed, easy:

...especially because I think she needs to go to school where her older sister is going because I think she will get great, kind of comfort from that, seeing her eldest sister (Sabine)

While stickiness may be perceived as a negative influence, the mothers expressed little frustration, and they were happy with the family ties they had, knowing the local area and being familiar and settled in their family life. These positive aspects of stickiness are expressed in the way that the women talked about the importance of being settled for their children.

Facilities

All of the mothers talked about the practical facilities available at the schools that they had considered, chosen and rejected. However, facilities are not something that appears in the literature to any great degree. When considering the most important factors in school choice, recent research tends to focus on proximity, school performance and school social mix (Burgess et al. 2009; Hastings, Kane, Staiger, 2006;

Allen, Burgess, Mckenna 2013, David et al. 1994). Some research has suggested that facilities are marginally important to parents (Williams et al. 2001). However, I would argue that, because facilities are a structural aspect of the school choice experience and something mothers would frequently be reminded of (in the form of prospectuses, etc.), it is easier for them to think about rather than some of the aspects they may not have experienced yet (such as the teaching and learning or results).

The mothers were all focused on different aspects of facilities. For example, Mosa and Deb were focused on looking at sporting facilities for their children, because that is where their interests lay, Rowyn was looking for the right mobility facilities for her daughter, Marie was looking for supportive facilities for her autistic son, and Sabine was considering the vocational and creative facilities offered by the school for her younger and less academic daughter. The child's needs determine the performance of motherhood in this instance:

...I remember thinking about what facilities the school needed and, to be fair, it ticked all the boxes anyway (Amelia)

... I mean, Lightmill had their own swimming pool whereas the Academy didn't, they also had better science facilities (Liz)

... I knew they didn't have the facilities so it wasn't really worth looking at (Marie)

...we have visited on open days and he did not like the facilities that they had. Some of the schools did not have swimming pools or good science labs, he did not like those at all. He was saying that his school now has better rooms and things (Mosa)

Therefore, the universal nature of this theme shows how the mothers were engaging with the school choice process on a practical level and trying to match the school to the child. What is interesting here is that, although the mothers talked about facilities matching their child, all apart from Mosa and Marie still ended up sending their child to the local school. The talk about facilities could be interpreted as the mother defending and justifying their decisions during the interviews or engaging with what they considered to be the right behaviours of school matching (the middle-class way), but restricting this to the reasonable choices they had.

This is a practical application of what O'Brien (2001, 2005) calls 'emotional labour', a form of gendered moral labour that mothers perform as part of their moral duty to their children. Emotional labour is particularly relevant during the transition to secondary school, as there is a lot of work, such as matching of the child to the facilities that is going on under the radar, which is a normalised expectation of motherhood performance – just what a mother does. Even though many of the mothers ended up sending their children to the local school, they still went through the process of matching and checking and emotional labour – in fact, there were none who did not. To these mothers, being a 'good mother' meant knowing what facilities your child's school had and making sure they were good enough.

Negative Factors Preventing A Choice

The second dominant theme to come out of Space and practices was negative factors preventing a choice. These all pointed towards the ways in which mothers felt that their choices of school were limited and operated on practical levels and psychological levels. There were many of these factors, some of which were intrinsically linked with the other sub-themes, while some are standalone.

Space, domestic space and the wider family

Nearly all the mothers discussed the secondary school choice and the effect this would have on the wider family. The focus was specifically on how the mothers organised and managed the space where they lived, worked and educated their children and the way that it intersects with wider family life.

There were several different angles that the mothers took to talk about these issues: how the choice of school affected family members still at home (mainly younger siblings), how the choice was affected by wider caring responsibilities (such as for ageing parents) and how the whole family had to change to take the transition of the child on board.

The way that the school choice process affected other members of the family came in different forms, from how it might have affected younger siblings (Sophie) to making a choice which didn't affect the stability of other family members (Hannah):

...when we had term dates given to us if they had teacher training days on different days that was a problem (Sophie)

Sophie here notes a particularly frequent problem with the differences in term dates between secondary and primary schools within the same region. This represents problems for the mother, whose responsibility it is to manage the process and keep everyone happy. Therefore, her performance of motherhood was determined here by balance, not just focused on one family member or child.

Another way in which the mothers talked about wider family roles was about other caring responsibilities. Both Stella and Liz noted how the changing of school times had affected their ability for their older children to pick up younger siblings from primary schools and how this affected their ability to work:

...Well, no, did you think about the people that needed their kids picked up from the primary school by kids at the high school? You didn't think about them, you didn't think about the impact on working mums; there's parents I know who were reliant on the school times staying the same way so their firstborn, who had just gone up to high school, could collect their primary child from primary school (Stella)

Other caring responsibilities was something, which was not a problem for many mothers who took part in the research, as some did not work or had flexible arrangements. However, for some of the mothers involved, they felt that they were being undermined and unfairly treated as single mothers; they also felt that the school

system was unable to provide a balance of an education for their child as well as the ability of the family unit to stabilise itself.

It is clear that the transition to secondary school meant some changes to the wider family were inevitable and the mother seemed to take on the major role of making these new family situations work.

The Experience Of Space And Choice

Nearly all of the mothers spoke about choice as a concept, but most of them focused on there not being any choice and that the only choice was the local catchment area school that was offered. Where mothers talked about choice more substantially, it was where they had the option to purchase private education or do something else to provide choice (e.g. move home, transport children, etc.).

There was a general feeling that choice is something that was not assumed, meaning that the transition from a particular primary school to a particular secondary school was the only real valid choice to be made:

... [the] Academy is now the only high school we have in the town (Stella)

...that's all I want is a choice, I want so badly, that we have an option for our children (Stella)

...And we don't have the choice, if the choice was there we'd all be gone (Liz)

...I knew that if I put Richburg down as the first preference that we wouldn't get it anyway because it is over-subscribed and we weren't in the catchment (Caroline)

The mothers did not talk about choice positively; in fact, those who did talk about choice framed it negatively. Their experience of the government policy was not about choice, but rather about the restriction of choice. Where the mothers did have alternative options available to them these were often seen as a last resort:

... we did look at some houses but it would have been cheaper for us to have paid the school fees than to move, and besides we are happy where we live, it's not our fault the sodding council can't get their act into gear around here, is it? (Hannah)

Hannah here is expressing frustration that the choices she made were out of her hands and she blamed the local council for not being able to provide the education she wanted for her son, with her performance of motherhood focusing at this point in securing the best education. The sense of frustration reflects significantly on her ideas and aims as a mother, but also on what she wanted for her children and that was not a choice provided by the system. Hannah and a few other mothers did shift away from the choices offered to them locally, and many expressed that they would want to provide a different education for their child if they could afford it. This signals that these mothers were thinking carefully about what was best for their children and often coming to the conclusion that the local provision was not adequate, but failing to provide an alternative due to other factors, however for many parents nothing is ever going to be good enough for their children. Being unable to provide a viable

alternative has an effect on the way that the mothers feel about themselves and how they perform motherhood, as knowing that you are not able to provide what you believe is the very best for your child can have a knock-on effect to other parts of life.

Isolation In Space: Not Being Local

Ten of the mothers talked about space and isolation, specifically referring to the potential isolation for their children of not being at a local school. The isolation of not attending a local school is something particular to the rural setting. Research conducted by, Walker and Clark (2010) found that the middle classes were more spatially mobile than many local people in the communities they joined and, therefore, had more spatial power and used this by choosing to attend out of catchment schools, as several of the mothers in the research had. Walker and Clark (2010) found not only that these out of catchment parents suffered from isolation, but from anger from the locals and also from judgments that they did not support their communities and lacked the necessary loyalty for rural life. This lack of loyalty was experienced by the mothers in the research; for many, this isolation was about the children not having local friends and, therefore, making a non-local choice as being inhibiting for the children. For Sabine, Angie and Deb it was of vital importance to them, and they considered how friendships and after-school activities would work if they were not in a local school:

...[the school] it is on patch, it does mean that if Bennett is making friendships that they are going to be local (Deb)

But for some of the mothers, the isolation of making the right choice (and not the local choice) was something which negatively impacted them and their children. Scarlett's story included several accounts of isolation, where her son was not included in his newly-chosen school because he was out of catchment and was rather alone at primary school because no other children would be going to a school other than the local one. This translated into the family withdrawing and becoming isolated. Marie commented that she thought the extreme leaning towards localism with education was a 'Lochbeach mentality' and not something that she was familiar with. These experiences were different also reflected in Deb's story, who compared her experiences with her own children with her upbringing and there being something different about the way mothers operated in this rural area. This represents the differences not only in the rural community but also a community that is isolated.

There were several other accounts of not being local being a negative factor and how it affected the children directly. Hannah recalled how, on 1st March, her son's class teacher read out the schools to which the children in the class would be attending, and her son was the only one who was going somewhere different:

...You know, they read out in class who was going where on the 1st March and only two kids were going anywhere other than the local school. I asked Callum about that and he was, like, that's alright mum, but I could tell it made him a bit sad, he is going to lose his best friend through this process and it all made me feel a bit guilty really (Hannah)

The guilt expressed here by Hannah is reflected in several other stories, and it is evidence for the choice process being impacted in a negative way by the isolation of

not being local. This shows that space/location was an important aspect of the performance of motherhood.

The Assumption Of The Local

While all of the mothers in the research were affected by priorities and the negative factors inhibiting their choices, the ways in which these affected the mothers were varied and different. However, all of the mothers in the research were affected in relatively similar ways by the 'local' nature of schooling and something which, during the research, I came to think of as the 'assumption of the local'. This was something that mothers perceived as being positive, negative or neutral (just something that happened). Localism was an important part of all of the mothers' decisions, not just because of the challenges that not being local presented them with (e.g. logistics, travel costs, etc.), regarding what appears to be philosophical decisions about schooling. There is an argument that local is an increasingly important factor for individuals and that people have not only attachment to their local space but also define large amounts of themselves by residential space (Savage et al. 2005: pg. 207). It might be assumed that as globalisation and mobility penetrate lives, that the local community would become disembedded (Giddens 1991: 146) and the attachment to place would have declined. However, evidence suggests the opposite (Savage et al. 2005, O'Connor 2008) showing increased attachment to the local as a reaction to globalisation (Flusty 2004, Inglis 2008, Robertson 2000) and would, therefore, explain why the local factor was so important to the mothers interviewed (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). Whether the mothers had lived all of their lives in the area or not (and therefore showed a sense of elective belonging) they showed a sense

of belonging and importance of the local and therefore a large part of this was expressed as attending the local school – which would seem to be a key site for community connection and motherhood performance.

The Ambivalent Transition

A frequent topic raised was that of the ambivalent transition, something which links to the theme of localism above. Defined as the child moving from their primary school to their defined local secondary school, it was discussed by all mothers interviewed. The local secondary school often worked with the primary school to provide transition activities for these ‘in catchment’ students; it ensured that the process was smooth and so that the children did not feel overwhelmed when they moved schools in the September. Some primary schools worked with several secondary schools, but this was rare in the mothers’ experience, and many felt that the ambivalent transition was just that – from their primary school to the local secondary school, with no divergence. There are several reasons why the ambivalent transition may have arisen as a common theme: that mothers are unaware of the choices they had, that they believed that their local secondary school was the best place for their child or that the work involved in moving their child to another, more appropriate school was too difficult/time-consuming alongside their other responsibilities.

The ambivalent transition was treated in two ways by the mothers in the study. There were those who treated it with some negativity and those who treated it as the normal route. Those who treated it with negativity tended to be judgmental of other mothers,

and this is discussed in chapter 7. However, normality of the route was frequently expressed:

...only two kids were going anywhere other than the local [secondary] school (Hannah)

... all the parents here, they all sent them to Beechaven, he was literally the only one [that went elsewhere] (Scarlett)

The negativity of the ambivalent transition came from parents who chose an alternative route for their children, and often came with a sense of disbelief that parents would opt for this route when it was not the best thing for their child, and they judged other mothers for being ambivalent. However, the main reaction from the mothers was that of ambivalence being the normal route:

...You go to school where you live, everyone does (Amelia)

...(moving) it just seems to be a simple decision, they are all going to Winsrich (Marie)

From these responses and the others like them, it was clear that, for many of the mothers, although the rhetoric of choice was something they were familiar with, it was not something that they saw themselves, or others engaging with. It seems that the government policy of school choice at secondary level seems to have failed to engage all of these mothers or provide the choices – although many of these mothers still undertook activities which looked like choice activities. However, at least one of

the mothers, Hannah, who was fully aware of her choices for her son, commented that the only contact she had with the local school was:

... the only thing I had to do was delete the local school off the form as the council had pre-populated it when I went to fill it in. (Hannah)

Gewirtz (2001) research suggested that successive British governments had tried to 'resocialise' working class parents to act more like middle-class parents and become responsible for the schools they made, by becoming engaged and interested consumers. The existence of the ambivalent transition in this research would suggest that mother were acting outside of these socialisation efforts, as Gewirtz's ideas are not confirmed by these results. This shows that, although the government policy is of parental choice, the local administration (schools and local authority) seems to be promoting the ambivalent transition and therefore working against the ideology of choice.

Right to a local education

Several of the mothers in the research strongly voiced their right to a local education and expressed views that they would have been shocked/surprised had their children not have got into their chosen, local secondary schools:

...Yeah, I don't have any worries, in fact I would be shocked if she didn't get in really (Sabine)

...I would have been very surprised if he hadn't have got a place, that it was kind of, we expected it, we live in the catchment area so why wouldn't he have gone. (Deb)

The views expressed here by both Sabine and Deb are played out in the literature. Research shows that parents show a preference for their local school (Flatley et al. 2001; Bradley and Taylor 2007; Coldron et al. 2008) and that parents also tend to send their children to these schools when possible, regardless of how the school performs. Therefore, poorly performing schools continue to get the support of the local community, regardless of examination results or Ofsted inspections, which is not how a free or quasi-market would act (Le Grand 1991). Research by the Department of Education (2008) found that 66% of respondents only applied to one or two schools and only 5% applied to three schools when making their secondary school choice. When asked why they applied to so few choices, 45% of respondents said that they knew they would get a place at their chosen school. These figures show that parents are confident that their right to a local education would be fulfilled and was evident in this research.

However, Lucy expressed a view which, although similar, did not assume this right:

...so in my head I was thinking if we move houses and we apply for Winsrich and we are out of catchment. I just really wasn't going to risk that after all (Lucy)

Here, Lucy is saying that she didn't feel that she had the right to a place if they were out of catchment and, therefore, would be doing everything possible to enable them being given a place at the right school. So, Lucy was comfortable in her right to a local

education, but also she was showing her spatial mobility in securing advantage in getting what she wanted for her children (Massey 1994).

It Was Easy To Do

On becoming familiar with the mothers' stories, they seem to fall into two camps: those who sent their children to the local school because it was the easy thing to do, and those who made alternative provision because they didn't think the local school was the right match for the child and, inevitably, described part of the school choice process as difficult. These represented two different modes of performing motherhood. Although the mothers who talked about the process as easy still described having some problems with the transition and space, these were expressed in ways that seemed less problematic than those experienced by the mothers who made alternative provision.

In the stories of Deb, Amelia, Rayna, Sophie and Sabine, they seemed very happy with the local provision available to them and, therefore, described moving their children from their local primary to their local secondary as being easy. Deb's comment sums up the views of the other mothers well:

...He has gone to a good school in the town we live in and it was just the easy thing to do
(Deb)

However, for parents like Hannah, Caroline, Angie, Scarlett and Rowyn, the decision was not easy, and they described having difficulty in not only deciding on the

alternative provision they wanted but also on the logistical factors in delivering it – these ranged from the financial implications of school fees and bus travel to children having to make new friends and being isolated from the communities in which they lived, as discussed. Angie’s story of having to impose a relatively long daily commute on her son and the guilt and personal feelings she had about:

... they were difficult decisions to make, but again because of the local schooling not meeting the needs of our son, these were personal feelings that we needed to overcome (Angie)

There is some argument here that the mothers who had the cultural, economic and social capital (Bourdieu 1973) to understand what their children needed regarding their education and be able to provide this, encountered some difficulty in making a choice. The comparison between the stories of the mothers who took the easy option and those who provided alternative provision do read very differently, with the ‘easy’ mothers providing a more relaxed and informal set of stories, whereas the alternative mothers provide stories which are more emotional and full of difficulties. These reactions show the expression of real choice as hard and consequently in this instance the performance of motherhood in the right way as tough.

Space And Motherhood

The last theme relates to space and the performance of motherhood. In this category, the mothers were relating stories and experiences that spoke about how their involvement with managing and directing space, especially the way in which their children would get to school, intersected with their performance of motherhood.

Letting Go

For all of the mothers who took part in the research, there was a sense that going to secondary school was a time of independence for the child and it signalled to them, as mothers, that it was time to start treating their child differently to the way they had been treating them at primary school. By this, I am referring to the way that mothers are performing motherhood at primary school and secondary school and the mothers' reflection on how things have to change – centered mainly around travel (although other issues did arise). For the majority of these mothers, it was the ability of the children to get to school on their own which signalled their independence and the change that they had to make:

... he doesn't need me as much as he did and I suppose that even getting a taxi to Winsford every day will make him a little bit more, err, well growing up I think, gaining new skills (Marie)

What Marie is referring to here is something that mothers talked about over and over. Sometimes, as Marie had, they referred to it with some regret, as if their roles as

mothers were being diminished by the process of independence, with some doubting their confidence in being able to do it:

...I also think, that, you know I probably wouldn't have let him grow up so much, it would have been tempting to, like, pick him up from school and stuff, but this way he has just grown up. (Angie)

However, some of the other mothers had made choices to enable the process of independence for their children and valued the experiences that it would bring:

... I wanted her to have the independence to be able to get to school herself (Sophie)

This is a critical point because it shows how the mothers used the school choice process to further (forced or otherwise) their project of motherhood. It certainly felt that it was a point of reflection/change, as mothers brought about by external circumstances

Strategic Chooser As A Performance

Motherhood was performed in different ways according to the stories of the mothers in this research. While some mothers treated the transition as an ambivalent process, other mothers actively chose strategic choice as something they were keen to talk about and identify with. Of the mothers in this study, seven of them talked about the strategic choices they had made about their children's education and wove these into the stories of transition and their performance of motherhood

The way in which Hannah and Angie negotiated strategic choice were similar. They both identified earlier on in the process that the local education offered was not appropriate for their children and, therefore, purposefully went about making different choices for their children, which were based on their performance of motherhood and involved making complex decisions about managing the space in which the families moved in:

...Errr, but we knew they weren't going to the local schools and, well, we couldn't afford private boarding schools, so it left us with a few options, which were the private day schools in Westview, a private day school in Werlington and state boarding schools. [sic] I pushed in favour of the state boarding schools, my politics favour towards the left and I didn't want to send him privately, I wanted to do that as a last option only. (Hannah)

Here, Hannah is talking about not only the alternative provision that she was making but also how it fitted in with her ideas of motherhood and how it was strategically chosen. She goes on to talk about how difficult it was to manage the process of sending her son to boarding school while still having a younger son at home. Hannah's story is unique in the research as she was the only one who sent her son away to school.

Although Hannah's story is quite an explicit example of strategic choice as performance, it was not the only one. Lucy put her family home on the market and had to negotiate with her husband, eventually overriding the type of house and location that he wanted to live in to secure the school place that she wanted for her children:

...my husband wanted a village because he didn't want to be in the town and I was like, no, we are going to buy this house to make sure we get that education, we can always move afterwards (Lucy)

Another example of strategic choice was that exemplified through Scarlett's behaviour. She moved her children several times throughout primary school to make sure they were getting the best primary education:

...he was at the local school here for the last two or three years, we did start him off at a different primary school, errm, but that sort of went downhill and this one improved so we moved both of the kids back to Byholt school (Scarlett)

By the time of the interview, Scarlett had moved her youngest son to another primary school, again to make sure he was getting the best education. Scarlett's behaviour here is consistent with the Neoliberal ideologies of school choice where parents should be at liberty to place their children in the most appropriate school. Scarlett's behaviour supports Chubb and Moe's (1988) research in that she voted with her children's feet and moved them to a better school. This engagement shown by Scarlett concurs with what Chubb and Moe (1988) predicted and therefore she was acting as an engaged consumer within the Neoliberal market.

For all of these mothers, their stories of embodying the performance of a chooser, no matter how extreme their behaviour may seem to them, was all justified by the fact of doing the right thing by their children and getting the right education for them.

Summary

The analysis above shows that spaces and practices are a core factor in determining how the mothers made their decisions regarding school choice and how they felt restricted in their choices because of some of these aspects. These factors built a framework for the mother's choice of school on a practical level and defined how they experienced choice. However, this framework was restrictive to some of the mothers who then actively sought to dismantle the factors preventing them from making a choice and finding the right school for their child. Overall, although education policy centers on school choice, this theme shows there is little room for mothers to make alternative choices of school. This restriction has then to be seen in the context of the analysis of emotions and relationships as follows.

Chapter 7

Analysis Of Findings: Relationships

This section focuses on the relationships that the mothers talked about in their stories, their complex nature, and factors which were centre stage while these women were performing motherhood within these relationships. During their stories, the women discussed their personal relationships with their children, partners and wider families, and also how their relationships with the schools, other professionals and society in general affected their thoughts and actions and enabled them to distinguish their mothering from that of others.

The process of school choice is socially embedded; it was expected that mother's relationships with others would affect the way that they performed motherhood. Previous research had suggested that relationships were significant, especially in the sharing and gathering of the information needed to perform choice (Ball and Vincent 1998, 2001, Gorard 1996). Relationships do not occur in a vacuum, and the emotion and conformity tied up in these relationships affect the way that choices are made.

The role of emotion in relationships is relevant because where high stake decisions are being made; the emotions engendered by these relationships can affect choice and the way it is performed (Gutnik et al. 2006, Ekman 2007, Gilbert 2006, Hanoch 2001). The more complex the web of relationships of the mother, the higher the emotions and their effect on choice and motherhood performance. The web of relationships also increases the exposure mothers have to group and societal norms, with many of these potentially conflicting. Societal and group norms are known to have an effect on

consumer decision-making showing that social/group norms influence preferences (Cialdini, Reno and Kallgren 1990).

The role of relationships is worthy of analysis in the ways that it affects the decision-making process and the performance of motherhood and the ways in which mothers expressed their relationships are shown in the table below:

Table 5.5: Subthemes Reflected In Relationships Theme

Relationships expressed	
Mothers relationships with other people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other mothers • Primary school • Secondary school • Authority/professionals • Partners/significant other 	Mothers relationship with the transition child
Mother's relationship with the wider family	Mothers relationship with society
Mothers view on themselves	

Mothers' Relationships With Other People

Many of the mothers who took part in this research lived in small communities and had very close relationships with others mothers that their children mixed with and, socially in the villages/towns. They also shared family histories in their environments,

and some relied on these in their family lives. Both Stella and Liz relied on the social networks they had created around them and their dependence on these relationships to make secondary schooling work for them and their children:

... I've got good friends and neighbours, I couldn't leave here. This is my support group..., I wouldn't have been able to do half the things, if it wasn't for the support of the neighbours helping me out. (Stella)

...[as a single parent].....I'm lucky that Harper is old enough to look after the youngest now, but they stay at home a lot on their own and when they were younger I relied a hell of a lot on friends and family. My mum did loads and always had them.....you have to cobble together some arrangement to make it work. If you don't, you are going to suffer and so are the kids. (Liz)

Both Liz and Stella are reflecting on how, as single parents, it is hard to juggle parenting, work and schooling without the extended social relationships to help. Also, that they prefer to turn to these areas for support rather than to state or institutional sources (Ghate and Hazel 2002). The relationships here are described in a positive sense in a way that describes how they were receiving and giving help to one another practically. However, positivity was not the only way that relationships provided support that came out in the research; some mothers also talked about the ways in which other people, sometimes other mothers, were helpful in providing useful information and advice in making the school choice for their children.

Mothers' relationships with other mothers

Lucy and Angie, both full-time working mothers, talked about spending time in talking to other mothers (fathers were not mentioned) about the choices they were making for their children in choosing secondary schools. These relationships were not central to their choices but worthy of note. Lucy recounts a story of changing her plans based on advice given to her by another mother and colleague:

...she asked what school I was sending him to...I said Richburg and she said I'd rather home teach than send them there, so there was a revamp quickly and rethink. (Lucy)

This verifies that for Lucy at least, she put a lot of faith in that particular mother's experiences, and that drove some of her choices. Angie had a similar experience, but talked about it in more general terms:

...I talked to people from work about the process; some close friends who are mothers and their experiences were helpful. (Angie)

However, when mothers talked about their relationships with other mothers, it was not always in a positive way. Seven of the mothers dominated their stories of relationships with negative stories of other mothers. These stories are split here for clarity; experiences are not described; rather, they are more about what the mothers' perceptions about situations were and their feelings about them. These results are contrary to other research carried out in the late 1990s that looked at the importance of the 'grapevine' surrounding mothers during the school choice process. This

research labelled the type of informal knowledge gained as 'hot knowledge', contrasting it with the more formal 'cold' knowledge which comes from league tables, Ofsted reports, etc. (Ball and Vincent 1998; Gewirtz et al. 1995). Ball and Vincent (1998) researched the grapevines surrounding mothers during the school choice process and noted that it was *'almost impossible to find a transcript where parents do not refer to drawing upon the impressions and experiences of friends, neighbours and relatives in their choice making'*. They also figured the grapevine as a way of parents embedding and confirming their choices. This compares starkly with the way mothers in this research characterised and used their relationships and the relative isolation they referred to. The market has moved in education since 1998 with groups of parents becoming more engaged and getting information from alternative sources and this could explain the lack of reference to the grapevine found in this research or it could be a feature of the rural landscape. Whatever the explanation, it is clear that the grapevine as found by Ball et al. (1998) was not evident in this research.

The mothers in this research could be more isolated in the social groups surrounding school choice as many of them worked and recognised they were rarely at the school gates; or, indeed, it could represent a movement towards a more objective approach to school choice, relying less on others.

Hannah's story was littered with feelings of guilt for sending her son to boarding school, not a common experience in the small community in which she lived. Although she explained it was the right choice for them as a family and something she felt that other mothers were judgmental of, in particular on an online forum she had been reading:

[about the online forum]...*Well, you should read the vitriolic stuff on there about women who send their kids to boarding school, according to them I'm worse than Hitler. I know people judge me all the time and to be honest I am secretly judging them, too, but it's like you never say anything do you? (Hannah)*

Hannah is describing a set of closed experiences and the private life of the family, which is almost locked away from the rest of the world. Whereas many of the other children would have been going through a very public transition, Hannah's son may not have been so open about his parents' choices and Hannah may not have been receiving the support she needed in her son's transition to secondary school, because of her fears about being judged by others, effectively performing motherhood privately. She went on to comment that:

... Not really, I certainly didn't speak to anyone else from Callum's school (Hannah)

Interestingly Hannah's story showed she felt judged by other mothers and, indeed, that judgment was expressed in public, albeit anonymous way (Santana 2014). This aspect of motherhood, where other mothers are judged and judge each other, can be seen in Goodwin and Huppertz's (2010) work on the 'Good Mother' and represents a physical manifestation of the effects of the discourse on mothers' lives, emotions and families. This judgment and the way it is being experienced by the mothers agrees and confirms Butlers (1990) proposition that performativity is policed at a high level in society. These mothers were policing the performativity of what they perceived as being good mothering through their judgments of others and in turn being policed by the perceived judgments of those around them. This policing keeps the others

performing in an acceptable way to society and is enabled because of the close sharing of space and the belief in judgment as a way of reproducing norms in society.

Scarlett's story was different but equally hard. She felt very isolated from a community that she had lived in all her life because she chose to send her children to a school, which was not in the local community. Scarlett's story showed that she felt that she was making the best decision for her children, but she felt that other mothers were judging her negatively. Scarlett's experience seems to conflict with the other parents involved and seemed to invoke some sense of disloyalty. Although research has shown that local schools are the preferred option for parents (Flatley et al. 2001; Bradley and Taylor 2007; Coldron et al. 2008), the other mothers' reactions to her choices were disproportionate and isolating. In talking about being judged by people in the village about moving her children's primary schools to get them into a better school, Scarlett continued:

[on being judged]... *Oh yeah, by everyone in the village, [laughs] errmm, the other people in the village, other mothers specifically, whether it is real or perceived (Scarlett)*

However, for Scarlett and her family, this has had a knock-on effect:

... we've just withdrawn a bit, we don't have contact with anyone in the village really, errmm, and both the kids, my youngest, is the only one now that has any link to Byholt (Scarlett)

At the time of the interview, Scarlett had put her house on the market to move to another village to improve the life of the family and not to have to deal with the socially isolated situation anymore. I believe this evidences that motherhood is expected to be performed in a local way and that Scarlett, by breaking out of the discourse was being punished for it.

Another story about being judged came from Marie, who felt judged because her son had a diagnosis of autism. Marie told a very positive story about her son and the way she dealt with the problems his condition brought, but with some emotion, she described how it felt to be in a peer relationship with other mothers:

...I can brush much of it, but you can see the way some of the other mothers look at you. Calvin (husband) tells me I'm being stupid when I talk to him about it and that I should ignore them, but it hurts because they think it's something we've done and we could fix it all if we were better parents, but we cant. (Marie)

She talked a lot about how she had engaged fully in the school choice process to find the right choice for her son and had made different choices to other primary school mothers. In doing so, she felt challenged by parents who hadn't done the same thing for their children, even though their children had no special needs, commenting '*what does that say about them as parents*'. What is interesting in Marie's story is that it shows the universality of the negative relationship that mothers have with each other from a distance:

...but yeah, secretly I do, I judge them all the time, but I don't if you're allowed to say that, you know female solidity and all that. But yeah, I do (Marie)

Mothers of children with SEN do engage with the school choice process earlier and are afforded different options. Research by Cole (2005) and Rogers (2007) underlines the experience of school choice for mothers of SEN children as being more emotional, fraught with power relationships between mothers and the educational/health professionals they interact with and places the mother as an intermediary rather than only a chooser of schools. The difference in this experience compared to those who are choosing for children without SEN contextualises the experiences of mothers like Marie as different. Therefore Marie's performance of motherhood being contextually different to mothers without SEN children.

Mothers' Relationship With The Primary School

All of the mothers talked about relationships with the primary school. They did not talk about it as it was mediated through their children but through themselves. The language used about the primary school was confident with words such as awesome, faultless, and close-knit being common; this was expected from previous research on the value placed on primary schools by parents (Forsythe 1984; Valentine 1997; Little & Austin 1996). It was frequent in the women's stories to find the primary school being compared to a community or a family, which added to the positivity.

Both Marie and Sophie had children with SEN, and these mothers had very close relationships with the primary schools that their children attended:

...the community is so small and close (Marie)

...I did feel that there was a little bit more of a family unit at the primary school (Sophie)

It is possible that these enhanced relationships were because the children required more care at primary school. However, these feelings were replicated throughout many mothers, who had close relationships with the primary schools that their children attended:

...because the primary school environment is great, yeah, it's a welcoming environment, very approachable and you do miss the contact I would say. (Rowyn)

Lots of the mothers talked about having more interaction with the primary schools, talking to the teachers and being more in control of what their children were doing in primary school. These experiences with the primary schools directly contrast with some of their stories about secondary schools and not having any control. This is supported by research specifically Russell and Granville (2005), who noted that engagement of parents was more defined at the primary school as there were more opportunities to engage with the school and these opportunities were less formal. As the children progress to secondary school, the communication becomes less effective and more formal; communication can break down as a result as parents feel they have less control and relationships deteriorate.

The appearance of control in nearly all the mother's stories represents the dissolution of traditional structures in society which has accompanied the increasing reach and importance of Neoliberalist policies in our lives. Deleuze (1992) used the term societies of control to describe the movement in society from the traditional enclosed structures of prisons, schools, hospitals, etc., described by Foucault as central to the power of disciplinary societies, towards entangled systems allowing us the perception that we have freedom to act, but with responsibility diffused throughout our decisions and are held responsible for. Deleuze considered that these operate through increased surveillance – whereby the illusion of freedom is maintained, but most people would fall within the acceptable dominant discourses without thinking to function. The surveillance and therefore control is extended to corporations and the state (schools) created through the privatisation project. Using as a starting point, in some ways the control sought by mothers in the performance of motherhood may seem to be a way of maintaining relationships with their children rather than surrendering that control to the schools and ultimately the state and also as a way of maintaining the family as a control structure in their children's lives. However, it may also reflect a keen sense in these mothers of the kind of responsibility that Neoliberal policies are designed to engender in a performance of choice – being rational and efficient and taking responsibility. For whatever reason, control is a continuing theme in the performance of motherhood and one that arises with both relationships and institutions.

Among the negative stories about primary schools, some were from mothers who had removed their children to gain a better education for them. In fact, even with this small sample, five of the mothers had already moved the children during their primary school careers and were no stranger to potentially strained relationships

with educational establishments. I would argue that, although the primary schools are valued and thought of fondly, mothers are still focused on what is best for their children and were happy to break that bond to gain a better standard of education for their children.

Mothers' Relationships with Secondary Schools

Whereas the mothers' stories were positive and emotionally charged about the relationships with the primary schools they spoke differently about relationships with the children's secondary schools. Secondary schools are larger establishments; they are perceived as more authoritarian in their structure and operation and seem to be run not with parental engagement in mind, but to turn out functioning and performing young adults into the world (although there are significant local and governmental programmes that try to encourage parental engagement because of its positive effects on student achievement, such as multi-agency working, the FAST Programme and Home School Knowledge Exchange Programme). So, where mothers' stories touched on their relationship with the secondary school they focused on the lack of communication and difficulty this caused, the way that the school treated them as a 'business' rather than a place of education, the lack of value that they felt was placed on them as mothers and absence of interaction – something which had been expected and almost a requirement of their child's primary education.

The lack of communication from the secondary school was frequent in mothers' stories, from letters coming home about parents' evenings to not being told about significant events:

... No, I don't get told, I don't get a letter, they come home verbal, they are supposed to verbally come home and tell you. No nothing, no letter, no email, no nothing. (Stella)

...about four weeks into school I got a message home from Emily, saying 'the PE teacher wants you to come contact her'. So I did, and she said 'Oh I just wanted to know what she could and couldn't do because she told me she'd had an operation on her legs.' The teacher had no knowledge whatsoever and PE is one of the biggest issues for Emily and I was disappointed and shocked really. Now whether that is the system and that's how it works, or it was just mistake, I don't know, but all the teachers that had her had no knowledge of her medical issues, so that worries me. (Rowyn)

Although Rowyn and Stella are referring to very different situations, one of which had potentially life-threatening effects, both situations were, in the mother's eyes solvable communication issues which affected their relationships with the schools and made them angry, making them seem large, unwieldy organisations unable to look after their children effectively. Research shows that where communication is effective between school and parents, that achievement, satisfaction and confidence in parents is highest (DFE Research Report 2010). However, this type of parental engagement and communication is increased in nursery and primary school, where parents feel more involved and part of the process, the engagement and communication drops in secondary schools (Russell and Granville 2005). Some mothers saw other problems with the secondary schools, focusing more cynically into the Neoliberal reforms that had been driving the school choice process that they were going through and were

motivating the institutions educating their children. Stella referred to the recent Academy transformation in the town as a negative thing:

...Then when you get up to the high school, and they don't give a monkeys because you're just a statistic, you're a number, you're just there to make them look good because the academy has to work. (Stella)

She goes on to talk about the school uniform policy which she viewed as prohibitive, and can only be bought from the Academy. The uniform Stella stated was costly and also changes on a frequent basis. This is something that she, as a single parent, finds difficult to cope with and finds it hard to juggle her finances to balance, but does not find the school sympathetic:

...Since the academy system has been put into place it has cost me an absolute fortune in footwear. The school changes its clothing policy as and when it chooses, what's acceptable one term is not acceptable another term, so you have a child what is put in transit for the day with no learning, no paperwork, no classwork, no lessons, they are sat in a room doing nothing because they've got the wrong colour shoes on or the wrong style shoe on. (Stella)

Stella does not understand the policies of the Academy, or why they would affect her child's education in this way, especially as, on her limited benefits, she cannot afford all of the demands the school are placing on her. The governmental changes to allow schools to be run as academies has far-reaching effects on parents, as Stella has experienced and might not engender the type of relationship needed between the

school and the parents for the children to gain maximum advantage from their education as Stella experienced. Again, the way that government policies infiltrate private family life in such a way is something that educational policy seems to ignore.

Deb's story was similar regarding being happy with viewing the school as a business, but she came at it from a different angle. She wanted the school to be grateful for the loyalty and not just stop 'wooing' parents as customers as soon as their children started attending the school:

..., you've got your child, but they are not doing anything in terms of loyalty, so if we were thinking in terms of a bank or something like that, they are not then continuing that relationship with the parent by telling me what they are doing or supporting. It's interesting I have not thought about it like that before. (Deb)

Deb's thoughts about loyalty and relationship management show a sense of perplexity in parents and schools. Schools are run as quasi-businesses (Le Grand 1991). Therefore, they operate on some principles of the market, but not others, creating in parents a sense of confusion about how the school is operating. In Deb's case, this generates a sense of doubt about continuing a relationship when she does not feel she is a valued consumer.

Rayna spoke as a mother and as someone who helped perform these transition activities from within schools. She was equally clear about why the schools pursued them:

.... I mean, the transition now is absolutely huge that's going on at our school now, but it's all about money, if we don't get them in we don't get the funding. (Rayna)

So, it's clear from these stories that Neoliberal policies driving the schools are obvious to mothers and affecting the relationships that they have with the schools and may even feed into a wider narrative. Although the mothers in the research did not note explicitly the Neoliberal policies which drove their choices, they did express their effects – showing that these penetrated family life and mothers' views.

On the whole, the mothers talked about the relationship with the secondary school being more at arm's length and the interaction being less than that at primary school, which is consummate with previous research about communication differences (Russell and Granville 2005). When noting the key difference between primary and secondary school, Scarlett noted:

...I would probably say that I think there was more interaction with her teacher when she was at primary school (Scarlett)

There was also some fondness for some of the nuances of the primary school mothers' role:

...with Robbie going to secondary school I am out of the cycle of school plays, costumes for the Christmas production and all that jazz (Amelia)

The relationship between the institution that the child spends the majority of his/her day with and the mother, who entrusts her child to that institution, is a complex one, and it is clear that it becomes somewhat more distant when the transition occurs. That is something that society expects as a child grows older; however, it is not something that a mother necessarily finds easy, and many of the mothers in this research saw it as a watershed in their relationships with their children and their performance of motherhood

Mothers' relationships with Authority/Professionals

The mothers told some quite difficult stories about their interactions with the professionals they came into contact with. Some of these stories were positive, and some had a negative tinge; however, all of the mothers showed some resilience and refused to be the passive recipients of the barriers these professionals placed in their way and were often able to develop strategies to circumvent these obstacles. Where the mothers were not able to evade a barrier, they channelled it as anger.

There were lots of positive stories, mainly where the mothers had come into contact with professionals at the schools because of a problem their child was having. Sophie recounted a long and upsetting story of how her autistic daughter was being bullied during her first year at secondary school, but when she took it to the school, the Deputy Head was swift to deal with it and very supportive of the children that had helped her:

...I got to speak to the vice principal. I told him what was happening, he made notes, but the thing that I was pleased about was that he not only dealt with the problem with my daughter, but he also gave a pat on the back to the girls who had helped (Sophie)

Lucy also had a similar experience with the Deputy Head at the school her son attended about a medical issue. Although her family thought she was being over-sensitive and taking the issue too far, she was happy that the Deputy Head had taken on her concerns as a mother:

... I thought it was really important for the school to be making you feel as a parent that you aren't overreacting. They have always been great at that, [sic] she gave me her email, sent the details through, I did a little email about I'm sorry I went on about this and she was like, emailed back and was like not at all. (Lucy)

However, good experiences were not the norm and by far the most common stories were that of negative interactions with professionals and authority. The professionalisation of motherhood (Savage 2002) and the accompanying plethora of institutions, healthcare professionals, educational professionals, etc., that comes with it, has challenged mothers' abilities and created a system of unnecessary interference which mothers do not perceive that they need, but need to access in order to get help and support. I believe that the perceived intrusion into motherhood of professionals can lead to mothers feeling undermined in their parenting skills and lacking confidence in their abilities and choices, which may lead to these interactions being more negative than positive.

There are some rather lengthy stories, and all of them are valuable. However, they cannot all be covered in detail, so I have chosen a few that raised interesting issues.

Hannah and Caroline shared an experience with the local authority. When they were going through the transition, both of them chose to try to engage with the local authority to understand the risk of putting down a particular school over another; they wanted to see whether they may lose their place at any school if they opted for a certain choice profile. Neither of them was able to extract the information they needed from the local authority and both expressed frustration with the local authority for not giving it:

...Well, I spent hours talking to the council, going through different scenarios, different people, it was horrible; they wouldn't tell me anything. And it was funny because I reckon that they knew the answer and they could have helped me, but the red tape, well it just stood in the way [sic]. It really pissed me off that they sit there with all the answers and treat me like a mug when all I am trying to do is the best for my son, and yeah I am angry about it but I have a right to be. (Hannah)

I wanted to know what would have happened if maybe I would have put the first choice down of Beechaven and second choice at Richburg; would she now be at Richburg or would she be going to Winsrich for her education, because you know what I mean, she hadn't got in, so that piece of information I felt like I was lacking. Similarly, when I did the MMR no one really knew whether there was any reliable evidence of this, that and the other, so it was like the same thing, I felt like I was being asked to make a decision and ultimately not having all the pieces of the jigsaw. (Caroline)

Caroline compared making a school choice to taking the MMR immunisation for her daughter. We live now in a different time, where the evidence for the MMR immunisation is clearer and outweighs the negatives. However, at the time that Caroline was making the MMR decision, it was far from clear whether she might be exposing her daughter to a life of autism; here, she is unsure of whether she will be exposing her daughter to poor examination results and a life of failure due to picking the wrong school. Ultimately, it is a decision she is taking on her shoulders.

The way in which Caroline is expressing her reaction to both of these decisions is regarding risk. According to Beck (1986), we live in a risk society. As traditional society, roles and families have decreased people have more choices open to them as they are not constricted by institution or tradition, this, in turn, makes people more aware and conscious of the risks they are taking and express this by calculating the rewards and penalties of the risks of their different actions and decisions. Beck considered that awareness made people more reflexive about the choices they were making as they put more consideration into them. So in the situation above, in years gone by Caroline may not even have considered the MMR a risk at all as the structure surrounding medicine and motherhood were more traditional and secure leading to a decision unfettered by choice. Choice of secondary school in the past when the results of examinations were not as critical as they are today, and there were industrial structures to provide jobs for most people did not seem like a risk. However today, it would be considered a major risk by most parents to attend a school where their child would not have a chance of reaching their potential, leaving them open to a life of joblessness and failure. The mother's experiences concur with Giddens's (1991)

assertion that risk and thinking about risk dominates the cultural mindset of our society and that this is why most of the mothers in the research mentioned the risk of making choices and this is reflective of the ways in which the media and government seek to make Neoliberalist policies work by letting parents make these choices, because without the risks choice would be impossible.

Caroline's story exemplifies risk, but also provides context for the pressure that mothers feel about performing motherhood in the right way, pressure that for them is very real, making choices with sometimes potentially difficult consequences.

Regarding performing motherhood, times of choice are key sites of performance. Children's transition to secondary school brings risks and choices that mothers navigate and where not only is performance of motherhood key, but also where society views this performance and judges it.

Mothers' Relationship With Partner/Significant Other

During the interviews, the mothers did not talk much about their partners; however, they were referred to throughout the interviews. Of the 15 mothers interviewed, all 12 of those who were married or in relationships talked about their husbands/partners (albeit briefly); the remaining three mothers in the sample were single and did not refer to the children's fathers or their role in the process. However, there was often a strong sense that, of the 12 married mothers in the sample, their husbands were a constant underlying theme, however fleeting the references. This is evidenced by the strong use of the word 'we' during the interviews. Research shows that mothers are by far the most engaged with the school choice process (Ball 2003;

O'Brien 2007). However, fathers do have a role in the process, but often feel disengaged from a process where the information and communication seem to flow through the female partner, even though the official process is ungendered. When mothers referred to their partners, these fell into two categories: how both mother and father were involved in the decision-making process, but conversely how the mother took the lead role and the overall responsibility for the decision.

Mother And Father's Joint Involvement In The Decision-Making Process

The way in which the mothers talked about the joint involvement in the school choice process was on a continuum with some of the fathers being involved in only a minor way and others sharing everything. Of the 12 mothers who talked about the involvement about their husbands, 6 talked about their husbands' involvement being minor or superficial, while the other 6 talked about them being very involved.

Both Mosa and Deb talked about their husbands' involvement being minor but specific:

...now, I will be honest, I didn't go but my husband did and he came back and was absolutely full of it. Considering we had already got a child at Winsrich, this was very interesting because he couldn't stop singing their praises, errmm, he was very excited about the offer they had for science (Deb)

...my husband has not visited any schools as he has been away on a research trip, but he has spoken to Theo about it, but it was more about information than anything else.

(Mosa)

Both of these mothers spoke of the involvement their husbands as positive and did not dwell on the different levels of responsibility that they took. However, for some of the mothers, the differential level of involvement was expressed in a dissimilar way. For Caroline and Amelia, there was a sense that their husbands had left the process in their hands, whether they wanted to take responsibility for it or not:

...he kind of left it up to me and I did all of it. He thinks it all happens automatically you know (Amelia)

...but I think he felt it was pretty much my decision to make, which made me feel awful. (Caroline)

For Amelia and Caroline, there is an awareness of the lack of participation on the part of the fathers. However, none of the mothers expressed any unwillingness to take on the lead role – although, as evidenced in the way that Amelia and Caroline spoke about it, it was not something they would have taken on by choice.

For Sabine, Angie and Marie, the involvement of their husbands was a key part of the process. For Sabine, there was a real shared sense of decision making, although an awareness that she was leading the sharing process:

...I mean, we do talk about the schooling a lot together, if I've got any concerns ever about anything then I will always tell my husband so is he aware of what is going on with the girls as well (Sabine)

For Marie, the sharing of the process and her husband's involvement was noted in a very positive way:

...Well, Calvin and I talked about it a lot; obviously, Gavin and making sure that he gets the best thing has always taken up a huge part of our life and we have talked about it (Marie)

Angie expressed her husband's involvement in a way which showed their shared understanding of the importance of the decision and how it would affect their son:

...Given we both felt that we had to provide the best, we were both in agreement all the way, though actually, we have quite different views most of the time (Angie)

The shared nature of the process was something that was evident throughout the interviews; however, there was a strong sense that the mothers took a different role to the fathers, which represents a wider trend regarding the division of domestic labour and childcare. While the UK Time Use Survey 2005 shows that fathers are increasingly spending more time on childcare and associated activities, in 75% of cases, it falls on the mother to take responsibility for these things, making it a secondary activity for fathers. I would argue that the role taken by fathers was more supportive than active in most cases of the women involved in the research.

Mothers And Fathers Taking Different Roles In The Decision-Making Process

The analysis above shows that both parents to some degree were conscious of school choice. However, in almost all cases, they inhabited different roles, and these differences were often led by the mothers' approach.

Lucy, a well-educated mother who worked in education, took a lead role in the process, directing what was going to happen and helping her husband to understand why her decisions were right for their children. When she was discussing the differences between the schools she had chosen and the one in a town her husband wanted to live in, she went to great effort to make sure she got her way:

... Oh yeah definitely, I have had to teach him right up until this term (Lucy)

This could be seen as a sensible split in duties with Lucy, who is knowledgeable about education taking a principal role and her husband being led into the right decisions. Lucy gives a real sense of how hard she was going to fight to get her children into the schools she had so carefully chosen and was not going to let anything get in her way, including her husband. Other mothers talked in a similar way about their husband's involvement:

[was your husband involved]..... I suppose as much as he could be, but really he only did what he was told to do (Rayna)

So there is a feeling here that the mother was the director of the school choice process.

Hannah also talked about the differences in the duties that she took in comparison to her husband:

...He was involved. He helped to draw up the final list of schools and took Callum to some of the school interviews, as I was working – we are that type of family really, quite tied up if you know what I mean. But he didn't do any of the paperwork or research... not that I minded of course, but my husband has a tendency to take all the easy jobs with the immediate rewards, leaving all the hard stuff to me. (Hannah)

The different roles that were inhabited by the couple are clear in Hannah's story; however, there is an impression that Hannah thought that the division of labour wasn't fair, as she did the majority of the hard work. This unfairness was a sentiment that was revealed in many stories. Rowyn explained how her husband's background affected the way in which he participated in the process:

...Yeah he did, he was very much with Richburg because of the practicality point of view and so he was probably opposite to me, errmm, and thought, you know, that she would be alright. She is academically bright so she'll be okay and that was his point of view, yeah he came along (long pause). He is, you know, ex-army, very disciplined; very much you just get on and do it. (Rowyn)

The difference in backgrounds meant that Rowyn's husband was very practical in his decision-making and taking a more pragmatic view, leaving Rowyn to be the nurturer and worry about her daughter's transition to school. She referred to a situation when her daughter was first bullied at secondary school:

...you know, it's very hard, I do think that she has got to find her own feet and got to learn to cope with things at the end of the day because that is the real world, isn't it? But on my other side it was very much that protective, I couldn't protect her from all of that.
(Rowyn)

The different roles inhabited by the mother and father also in some cases, lead to problems in the marriage and home life. Hannah, Angie and Rowyn all talked about the arguments that occurred during the school choice process:

...My husband and I had constant niggly little arguments about it, my constant worry was that he wouldn't get offered a place anywhere (Hannah)

...there were a few moments where it got a bit heated between us, but that was because I was so worried and he couldn't understand why (Angie)

...Just my husband, he doesn't think it was the best thing and, to this day, he still says let's not go there (Lucy)

These arguments evidence the stress of the process on both parties and how strongly the mothers feel they need to do the right thing by their children. I do feel that, what

the mothers reported was a normal part of the stress of their children's life transitions and that it is common for relationships to be challenged at these points (Rollins and Feldman 1970).

Many of the mothers also told stories about how their relationship with their partner had changed during the process, although this change was not always positive. Changes could be due to redefinition of positions within the whole family unit, reduction of dependency and an acknowledgement that the transitions around schooling require change, which some members of the family might not be comfortable with. Lucy talked fondly of how the independence of her children moving to secondary school had put her marriage in a different place and she had to re-establish her relationship on different grounds:

...Yeah we have started to talk about ourselves again, we talk to each other about things other than them (Lucy)

So, for Lucy, the whole experience had a positive effect on her marriage, although she seemed very conscious of the changes and how to handle these. Most of these changes could be because of the different way that Lucy was performing motherhood after the transition. For others, the experience wasn't as positive. For Rowyn, on discussing her relationship with her husband:

...Yeah, I think so, I think it's more distant... Errmm, she has got to the age where the bickering has started, and he will be like no, you're not doing it, but she'll then have a flare-up of tantrums, but he wants to reason with her after that, and it's too late then,

the fireworks have gone off, then slamming doors and whatever, so I end up being the peacemaker (Rowyn)

For both Lucy and Rowyn, they reflect on how the changes for their children, growing up and gaining more independence changed their marriages. This is not unexpected considering that relationships are built on particular circumstances and experience some unrest when change occurs. Literature has shown that becoming a mother and motherhood brings with it significant changes to the way the mother views herself and the life transitions of the child can trigger changes to the way she performs motherhood and her relationships with others (Bailey 2000; Oakley 1979; Sethi 1995).

It is apparent from this exploration of relationships that the mothers had support from their husbands in the decision-making process. The single mothers in the research found support from elsewhere: friends, family, etc. showing that the process requires help, support and guidance from one source or another.

Mother's Relationship With The Child Going Through The Transition

The way in which the mothers talked about their relationship with their child going through the transition was a dominant theme throughout and was expressed in many ways. All of the mothers talked about this relationship from one perspective or another and many touched on similar issues throughout.

The mothers in their stories raised several issues; one of these was how much they involved the child in the school choice process. While some mothers who expressed that they had a wide choice of schools often involved their children in the process, mothers who did not see much of a choice assumed a relatively linear transition to the local secondary school with less child engagement (Fitz et al. 2002). This involvement of children in the process of choice can be seen to reflect changes in the way that childhood is socially constructed by these mothers and in society, therefore changing the ways in which they interact with their children. Childhood is a social construction, which determines behaviour and how children are treated (James et al. 1998). In many of the mothers' stories children were involved in making choices which is consistent with Postman's (1994) assertion that childhood for some is disappearing as the distinction between adults and children are becoming blurred – in the case of school choice, children being involved in making rather adult choices. The recognition of the child as a 'specific person' rather than something in 'becoming', gives children an importance in themselves and places prominence on them as party to constructing their own childhood experiences and recognises the everyday lived experience of being a child (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). However, the mother's intentions for involving the children is not always obvious, and it may be that they felt this was the right way to engage their children, therefore making a parenting decision and reflecting more on their performance of motherhood than the construction of childhood (Zelizer 1985). Caroline, Rowyn and Angie talked about involving their children in the choice process and it is worth noting that all of these parents considered private education and a larger range of schools than some of the other mothers:

...We did very much involve her in the process, erm, because we wanted her to feel comfortable with the decisions that we were making, erm, and we wanted her to feel included and wanted her viewpoint on it. (Caroline)

Caroline talks about involving her daughter to make her feel comfortable with the choice and the next stages of her life. Rowyn did a similar thing, while maintaining that the choice was hers as a mother and also understanding that her daughter wanted to go to a school that she couldn't afford:

...you know, although I listened to her points of view and, errrm, I could understand them at the end of the day, it was my sole decision (Rowyn)

...We involved him in the final selection of the schools, we filtered out the schools we didn't think were right for him which wouldn't be involved. I feel I know best, so we filtered them and then let him have a contribution to the final decision that was made. Obviously, the final decision was made by me and my husband, but he did have an input (Angie)

These stories about involving the child were not unique, however they were at the high end of involvement. Other mothers such as Amelia took a different route and talked about not involving the child at all:

...Well I certainly didn't involve him, I didn't even ask his opinion about where he wanted to go (Amelia)

Where there was no choice (or the mothers did not actively seek to make a choice and making an ambivalent transition), the child seemed to be involved less. Therefore, the mothers all took a different approach to involving their child in the process and whether they did or not was influenced heavily by the feasibility of choice. The mix that was found in experiences between the women in regards to how much the child was involved in choice represents what is known from the literature. Although children are rarely given sole choice of where they will attend secondary school, 20-30% of decisions are made jointly between the child and the parent, with only 14% of children being given no choice at all (David et al. 1994; Thomas and Dennison 1991; Forster 1992). Therefore, the mothers all taking a different approach to involvement is what would have been expected.

Closely linked to the decisions mothers took to involve their child in the decision-making process was the position by which they defended this and how protective their relationship with the child was. All of the mothers, without exception, defended their decisions and choices, referring to protecting the child. While some mothers talked consistently about protection in a general sense within their duties of motherhood, others used this as a foundation for their choices.

Caroline, Rowyn and Hannah spoke of limiting the amount of information that the child received in order to protect them:

*...I did, but that's my role as a mother to sort of be there, protecting everyone else from it
(Caroline)*

...I was really worried at that point – I didn't show it in front of Callum, I just did the whole brave mum thing, but I was really worried (Hannah)

...I never spoke about my dislike of her, you know, going there; we always fed the positives, you know, it's going to be as good as, you know, Werlington (Rowyn)

For these mothers, they saw it as part of their role as a mother to protect their children from the choices that were being made. It is natural that the mother seeks to protect her children from the realities of the school choice process and, by doing so, absorbs more of the responsibility onto herself. The narrative of the 'Good Mother', (Arendell 2000) places strong emphasis on protection, and it is something that we see as normal mothering that is represented in the media, fairy stories, etc.

The focus on protection was expected and something that society expects mothers to do. However, another dominant theme in the way that the mothers spoke about their relationship with their children was about independence and learning how to step away from their child as they are growing up and maturing in order to let them develop as individuals. All the mothers talked about stepping back in their role as mother to let their children develop and all seemed to show a deep understanding of why this was necessary for growing children. Some of the mothers were concerned about teaching their children to be independent:

... So I have consciously taught them how to be independent and on their own. (Lucy)

...The transition means that not only have I been getting him ready, practically like getting him to make his own boiled eggs, learning how to use a washing machine and things like that, but I have been trying to let go a bit (Hannah)

Many of the mothers talked about independence. The data shows that mothers accepted independence as part of the transition – a watershed in the child's maturity; however, few recognised this with any sense of happiness:

...he is taking a new step on a new adventure in his life, but yes I just felt I did have that feeling of, you know, my little boy is going (Deb)

... but I have been trying to let go a bit. Err, it is really hard... Callum is my baby and I don't think I am ready to let go of him yet. (Hannah)

...I guess then it's a bit sad and I think I will miss him a bit. Is that silly, can you miss your own kids? That sounds stupid. (Marie)

Alongside this sense of sadness was a genuine worry that the independence gained by the child and their lack of control was diminishing their role as mother. The lack of control was something that, for Marie and Sophie, both the mothers of children with special needs, found difficult to cope with:

...is going to be a little bit hard because he will be doing stuff on his own that I don't have control over. (Marie)

..I think that the complications that you have, errmm, are different to a parent who can literally just let go and I, so, I held on to the reins longer because of my apprehension
(Sophie)

But, while some of the mothers accepted the change in the level of control they would have over their child's life from this point, others fought this by facilitating a situation in which they could continue to feel in control for longer. For Scarlett, she worked at the school she sent her children to and expressed this when asked if she wanted to remain in control:

... I think I have and it's important for me, whether that is right or wrong (Scarlett)

It is evident that, considering how mothers talked about independence and control, that their relationships with their child and their role as mothers was changing as the school choice process unfolded. Few of the mothers seemed ready for this or had even anticipated the changes that lay ahead of them. All of the mothers talked about change and how this was a feature of the transition period; nevertheless, the speed of change came as a shock to several of the mothers and the scale of changes they saw in their children was startling. Angie, Rowyn, Marie and Scarlett all expressed a sense of shock at these changes:

... Everyone said to me, you wait until she gets to secondary, but no, and it was a shock... you know, it's like they go from one extreme, you know like being very young to adults
(Rowyn)

...[change] They do it right before your eyes don't they, at this age. I remember with Regan, she changed so much at this age, at one point she was running around in a tutu and pretending to be a princess, and then she was trying on mascara and being a right madam. (Amelia)

...It's like he's been taken away from me in some ways, like I lost something and got something else. Sometimes I don't even recognise him, I go and pick him up from places and I have to really look for him because I don't see him quickly, or when he picks up the phone and I don't recognise his voice because it's got so deep and that's a bit spooky. It's like a stranger living in my house and eating the contents of the fridge (Angie)

... with Jordan I think he's always done as he's told, he's a good boy, but it's only recently that he's getting his own opinion, so it's coming more of a shock to me (Scarlett)

The result of this feature of the relationship between the mother and the child going through the process was that the mothers ended up feeling like the child didn't need them as much anymore and their role as a mother had diminished. Angie described this change when she reflected on the realisation that her son didn't require as much help as he used to:

...Definitely, oh yeah, absolutely. I suppose it was the point that I realised that I didn't need to be a full-time mum to him anymore... For the first time, I think I am not needed all the time and that is hard for me to think about (Angie)

All of the mothers touched on change during the interviews and reflected on how their performance of motherhood changed over the school choice process through their developing relationships with their children.

Mothers' Relationship With Wider Family

Relationships with the wider family (parents, siblings, other children) were seldom mentioned and were referenced in about nine of the mothers' stories. Most of the references to the wider family were about the mothers' parents; while, for many, members of the wider family remained on the periphery of the school choice process, for some they were a significant support structure. In the last chapter 'stickiness' to place was raised as a process which intersects with choice, however, this stickiness to place is mediated through the relationships that the mothers have (kinship) and has developed whilst living in the community, therefore the two themes of space and relationships are linked unambiguously through this factor. There is little literature on the role of the wider family in the school choice process, and this is probably because mothers have taken on responsibility for the process and the choices they will make and are not keen on involvement of family members, which might problematise the process or challenge their decisions.

Liz and Stella, both single mothers with little other support, relied heavily on their parents to provide assistance when they needed it. Liz had sent her middle daughter to live with her parents for her to access a better school, but recognised that this put pressure on both her parents and other parts of her family:

...Well I've already sent one away and it made me feel horrible, one it disrupted my family life because poor Abi was then put in with her Nanna and Granddad and, as much as she loves them, that's not mum. Their rules and things of doing are totally different to Mums. You know that. So having to ship my child off from Sunday through Friday, it was emotionally hard on her, it was emotionally hard on me. (Liz)

For Liz, she was able to rely on this assistance even though it took a toll on her family. However, for many other mothers, their parents were not involved in the process other than in a minor way. Hannah and Rowyn talked about how they had tried to tell their parents about the decisions they were making but did not feel supported by them:

...Mum is quite cross with me for choosing a boarding school for Callum, she feels it is not right to send him away at 11 (Hannah)

...[my parents] they had very strong opinions on where she should go and that was Werlington and that was at any cost, errmm so I think the fact that when I said she needs to go to Richburg there wasn't a great deal of support there. It was like okay, it's your daughter and, but you know. (Rowyn)

These stories show that, for some of the mothers, not only were they feeling judged by other people, but they were also feeling judgment from their close family. This must have put significant pressure on the mothers and the way they felt. The judgment was returned by some mothers in the way they felt about the decisions their own parents made about their schooling. Angie talked about how her mum and dad were not

interested in her schooling and Amelia echoed this in explaining that school choice wasn't a 'thing' when she was a child:

...When I think back about it, my mum and dad weren't that interested and it seems quite strange to me now that we put so much into the process and they didn't (Angie)

...I went to school in the 70's and I think the world was different then. I went to the local primary, here in Westview and then Winsrich when it was a grammar school, you know before it was turned into the college. It was just, well, everyone did at the time (Amelia)

Other aspects of the wider family were mentioned. Many of the mothers who still had younger children at home talked about how the transition would change their relationship with the younger child/ren, while some talked about how the child going through the transition changed the wider family dynamic by causing more arguments at home and disruption.

Mothers' Relationship with Society

Most of the mothers focused on their personal stories during the interview, but some talked openly about how they felt that their roles as mothers carried an expectation by society about school choice. While the expectations of mothers differs due to culture, nationality, class, etc., mothers are assessed by these standards and their children are often held as a measure of their success or failure (Florina Florescu 2013; Arendell 1999; Phanco 2004). Stella and Caroline, who had very different choice

options open to them, talked about feeling pressure from society to do the right thing for their children and make the right choice:

... Yeah, I felt like ultimately there was a lot of pressure on me to do, erm, to make the right decision and I felt like I was making the decision and everyone around me was expecting me to make the decision and it felt life-changing (Caroline)

...And that's all anyone can ask you for, as long as you know you've done your best, you can do no more. (Stella)

There was no one telling these mothers what was expected of them; they were inhabiting the narrative of the good mother and performing how they thought they ought to. Mothers learn these expectations through their own socialisation as well as through the media and relationships they are exposed to; comparing themselves against these.

Mother's Views On Themselves

All of the mothers, to some extent, spoke of changes in themselves and the way they performed motherhood due to the transition process. For many, these statements were negative and had connotations of loss and grief; for others, they expressed an understanding of a new phase in their lives and how the transition acted as a catalyst. This represents how mothers perform through their relationships and, therefore, how changes in these relationships through major life transitions would lead to some rethinking and reflection of the performance of motherhood (Hays 1996; Chodorow

1978; Gilligan 1982; Josselson 1987). For Amelia and Angie, the way in which the transition had affected their views on themselves was centred around their role as mother:

... I think he has grown up and, although he was reliant on me in the past, I am now less important in his life than I was before, [pause] it's good by the way, but a bit sad, things change but you're not always ready for them, are you? (Angie)

... I am thinking that a whole part of me will be going to big school with him and I won't ever get that back, the beginning of the end I guess (Amelia)

There is a sense here that the mothers are losing part of themselves with the transition. They are no longer the mothers of young children, but of young adults and learning to incorporate this (or these new people) into the way that motherhood is performed was not an easy thing for them to do. Research supports the experiences of the mothers in the research; women take time to enlarge (i.e. make the space both physically and psychologically), to taking children into themselves and it is, essentially, a self-expanding exercise (Laney, Hall, Anderson and Willingham 2015; Laney, Carruthers, Hall and Anderson 2014; Ali et al. 2013). This, therefore, involves the loss of something and gaining a new perspective.

The talk of these changes and regaining some freedom from the mother role was also discussed in a positive way by Liz, Stella and Lucy. While Lucy had found that the relative liberty as the children grew up provided her with a chance to reconnect with

her husband, Liz and Stella, being single mothers, expressed a willingness to regain some of their own lives:

...You can invest so much time in your children, but eventually your children do grow up. You've got to have a plan for yourself as and when that time comes. (Stella)

...Yeah, I don't want to get old, but I do want to get old because I think when I'm old maybe my kids will be grown and I can just have some me time, being a parent, juggling work and having me time and I don't get me time (Liz)

The way the mothers spoke about their relationship with themselves was engaging and showed that the transition acts as a catalyst for the mothers in terms of developing new ways of thinking about and defining themselves. Whether the mothers experienced this change in a positive or a negative way was determined by their perception of themselves as mothers (how they inhabited the role and performed it) and also by the family situation. Mothers who had smaller children left at home talked more positively about their older children growing up, while those who were 'losing' their youngest children to secondary school expressed the sentiment less positively.

Summary

This analysis shows that the mothers operated in a complex web of relationships, each of which having some influence in the way that they navigated the school choice process and performed motherhood throughout this time. Although many of these

relationships were supportive, the mothers overwhelmingly talked about being on their own and therefore relationships were secondary. The stories showed that mothers went through the process individually, and it was not really a shared experience as many have been expected.

Chapter 8

Analysis Of Findings: Emotions/Affect

The process of school choice encouraged by the Neoliberal reforms is designed to produce rational, logical consumers who make decisions based on the processing of the information available to make the right choices for their children. There is no room for emotion in the process of making logical consumer choices. However, emotion is part of the process and as Sayer (2005) comments 'emotions are not a redundant accompaniment to business life' (2005: pg. 34). Throughout the interviews, the mothers focused much of their stories around the emotions they felt while going through the process.

Emotions are a critical part in choice for several reasons; firstly emotion is adaptive. Feelings of emotion are critical to our survival and keep us away from harm (Haselton & Ketelaar 2006, Ketelaar 2004). They help us overcome our own cognitive limitations by prioritizing certain factors while dismissing less important ones and essentially giving direction to certain behaviours (Bagozzi, Baumgartner, Pieters & Zeelenberg 2000, Frijda 1986, 2006) and they restrict the range of choices available to us by automatically reducing the number of choices because of our emotional reactions to them (Hanoch 2001), therefore allowing us more time and effort to focus on a smaller number of options. Emotion provides us with pathways to motivate our behaviour and guides us towards the right choices and away from the wrong ones. Choice does not, however, happen in a vacuum, there are various cultural, social and economic factors playing on our emotions and our choices which are often not clear

on the surface but can be illuminated by the narratives that people construct around their choices and the position of emotions within those.

The place of emotions within the women's stories shows it as a routine part of their lives (Smart 2007) and significant to them. I would argue that it formed a critical site of performativity for them as mothers, as they built much of their justification about their behaviours and choices around the emotions they felt. The way in which the mothers wove emotion into their stories explains something about the world they inhabit (Seale 2000).

The mothers not only discussed their emotional responses about providing a stable foundation for the transition child and the family during the transition period but also talked about their own emotions and how these affected them. All of the mothers discussed emotions at some point, and many were candid about the feelings that the school choice process had provoked in them.

During the interviews, the mothers naturally differentiated between the emotions they felt before and during the school choice process and those that they felt afterwards. In order to understand the experiences of the majority of the mothers, I have chosen to focus on only a few of the emotions expressed, these are:

happiness/relief, pride, anxiety/worry/nervousness, my child is different, worry about the choice, grief, loss, accepting someone different and judgment. There were other emotions expressed, but these were considered too minor to warrant further discussion, they are available to see in Appendix H.

Table 5.6: Subthemes Reflected In Emotions Theme

Emotions expressed
• Happiness/relief
• Pride
• Anxiety including Worry and Nerves/Nervousness
• My child is different
• Worry about whether I have made the right choice
• Grief/loss
• Accepting someone different
• Judgment

To consider the positive emotions, I have chosen to focus on happiness and pride/relief. These occurred in the stories and stood out by being conveyed in the strongest of ways. Although positive emotions were infrequent, when they were expressed it was with enthusiasm, and the women placed a significant emphasis on many of the emotions they expressed.

Happiness/Relief

The mothers who had experienced a negative or difficult navigation through the school choice process rarely talked in positive terms at all about their experiences. However, some mothers did, and happiness was one of the few positive emotions that

the mothers included in their stories. They discussed this in two ways: firstly, in relation to the importance of the child's happiness and, secondly, as a reflection of how they felt about the process. The mothers' happiness was only referred to after the process had been completed and not during the process, creating a clear delineation.

Both Amelia and Hannah spoke about how they were glad that the process had worked out for them:

...Well I was happy to know where he was going and ermm, err, he was happy too. I didn't expect to be relieved, but I am (Amelia)

...I am relatively happy with the way the situation has panned out (Hannah)

Speaking about happiness was linked to a sense of relief that the situation had worked out for them as they had planned and their efforts to get their child into the right school had been worth it (Ortony, Clore and Collins 1988). The sense of relief and happiness expressed in this way indicates that the mothers' experience of the choice process was not positive as it occurred and the sense of relief is probably because of the prior stress. Relief may be because the event was stressful for the mothers and, therefore, well remembered due to the effect of stress hormones on memories (Heuer and Reisberg 1990).

Happiness was also expressed by some of the mothers about how they felt when their child went to school:

... I'm sure it's hard, he goes and that makes me happy (Deb)

... I'm just thrilled and really happy that, you know, they are just getting on with things and doing really well (Lucy)

Both Deb and Lucy were happy about the way that their children had approached school and gave them a sense of achievement that they had made the right decisions about school for them. The quotes taken above to exemplify happiness are modest. In part, I think this is because each story represents something unfinished. When the educational journey is over, I would expect happiness to be expressed in a less cautious way. These mothers are all judging themselves to some extent by their children's success at going to school and taking full responsibility for their children's satisfaction and accomplishments (Arendell 1999; Goodwin and Huppatz 2010). I would argue that the sense of happiness that these mothers are striving for and expressing could be because of their success in fitting in with the desired lifestyles and social choices which are acceptable and viewed as adaptive in society. Ahmed (2010) claims that this happiness orientation (the promise of happiness) is a form of social control steering people towards certain social choices and away from others. Ahmed's views of happiness and the pathways to achieving it, fit with the stories the mothers told: making the right choices, their children being happy, relief of stress, etc. The happiness orientation works to boost the social benefits of the Neoliberal choice policies by happiness being defined in certain ways (i.e. making the right choice) and conformity producing happiness. Several of the mothers did not talk about happiness, and these were those who were potentially dislocated from the accepted social

discourses of happiness, (Ahmed 2010) such as the single mothers and those with children who had SEN.

Pride

As one might expect from talking to mothers about their children, pride was an emotion that was frequently raised. There were several different types of pride; however, overall, 8 of the 15 mothers interviewed talked about pride in their children and how it made them feel. There were two major ways that the mothers talked about pride. Firstly, regarding achievements their children had made while at secondary school and, secondly, with the child's ability to cope with the transition.

Both Mosa and Rayna talked about how the achievements of their children and what they had accomplished made them feel:

... most memorable, I think when he came home with the form captain badge, well there just have, after they've settled in for a week, they kind of the form tutors, gets a feel for who they are and if they are responsible... [how did that make you feel?] Yeah absolutely, very very proud. (Rayna)

...I think when we got the letter to say that he had received a scholarship to Clifton was an amazing moment, I was so proud of him (Mosa)

It is not unusual for mothers to be proud of their children. However, the transition to secondary school finds a significant number of opportunities for children's

achievements and, therefore, maternal pride (Magwaza 2010 in O'Reilly 2010). A large redefinition of the mother/child relationship continues with mothers learning more about what their children can do and how other parties and institutions view them, this information is then absorbed into the performance of motherhood and creates redefinition and performance change.

The second way in which mothers talked about pride was in how their children had just 'got on with it' and transitioned to school. Both Caroline and Scarlett specifically talked about their pride in the way that their children coped with the transition:

...I was just dead proud of her; I mean ultimately I made the decision but she is the one that has to go through with it (Caroline)

...well I was worried about him, but I would have been whatever school he went to errm, so he has just coped with it and I am proud of him (Scarlett)

These expressions of pride at coping with the transition underlie many of the mothers' fears about the complexity and enormous nature of the transition and their apprehension that their child would not cope. The relief that accompanied the pride is palpable and mothers spoke with passion about this aspect of their emotional relationship with their child. This may also represent a profound difference in the way that mothers view the importance of the transition as being significant for them and their child, whereas society seems to view it as only important for the child.

Other elements of pride were mentioned. For example, both Sophie and Deb talked about how they felt when their children were dressed smartly for school, while Sophie explained how her daughter had learnt to tie her own tie – which was a milestone for her. The focus on pride for mothers was celebrated as a form of success and a positive focus on the relative negative experiences of the past. Also, it was about learning how to practice motherhood and seeking to adjust their mothering (and consumer) behaviour accordingly (Carver and Scheier 1998; Higgins 1987; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990).

Negative Emotions

When talking to the mothers, it was clear that many of them had not only had extremely negative experiences with the school choice process but also felt very negatively about the process. The emotions listed in Table 5.6 show a significant number of negative feelings associated with the process and they overwhelmed the positive emotions. The two most talked about negative emotions were anxiety/worry/nerves and grief/loss. Again, focusing on these does not seek to dismiss the other experiences; rather, it simply represents the majority of the women in the research.

Anxiety Including Worry And Nerves/Nervousness

Anxiety was a key theme to emerge in the stories and existed on a continuum of mild to extreme. The feature of anxiety in these stories is not unexpected as it can be argued that there is more anxiety in modern society than in any other time in the past.

Anxiety is feelings of nervousness, etc. when faced with perceived danger or harm or the threat of it and has physical as well as psychological manifestations (Da Costa 1871, Beard 1890, 1884, Freud 1909). Anxiety is not a natural phenomena dictated by biology, is it experienced by everyone differently and arises from individual appraisals of threat inducing situations. Anxiety can be explained from different angles: psychological, medical, philosophical, etc. However, one of the most engaging explanations, although shaped around a framework of religion (sin, redemption, eternal judgment) is that of Kierkegaard (1849: pg. 61) who proposed that anxiety was an expected reaction of the soul when faced with the 'yawning abyss of freedom'. Anxiety informs us of the choices we have available, raises our self-awareness and responsibility and creates a predicament where we have 'dizziness of freedom'. If choice causes anxiety, then it is no wonder that individuals experience more anxiety, in the choice-filled world we live in, and school choice is no exception. This can be linked back to Deleuze (1992) whose ideas that choice has increased under societies of control as the traditional enclosed structures of society have dissolved – the more we become bound in internally tangled systems which increase our perception of choice the more anxiety we feel. Choice was limited when we operated under the enclosed structures of discipline; now they are disappearing; the ties determining choice binding us less and opening up possibilities. These tangled systems, lead by increased technology have also created a culture of comparison and sharing which encourages anxiety and makes all choices crippling and exhausting. The mothers involved in this research operate in a world where there is financial instability, fundamental changes in work and housing and where there are no longer set pathways or futures for their children. This uncertainty raises the stakes for the choices they make– if they don't make the right ones, their children will be doomed to

a life of failure and poverty. Therefore it is expected that anxiety would arise from the appraisal of such a situation. The Neoliberal policies implemented to create school choice and a market in education, have been sold to parents in many ways, but the aspirational outcomes of the correct school choice have been explicit throughout (Campbell et al. 2009) and the responsibility of making the right choice falls to the mother.

When the mothers in the study talked about anxiety, their responses fell into two different categories: worry that my child is different and that the secondary school won't understand and worry about whether I have made the right choice.

My Child Is Different

Many of the mothers in this study reflected on how different their children were from other children of the same age and expressed significant worry that the secondary school would not appreciate them for what they are or be able to treat their child as an individual. This links somewhat to the earlier theme of space and school size. There was an assumption that the primary school did treat their children as individuals and were able to cater to their needs, but somehow this would be lost at secondary school as the size of the school increased and the number of children being dealt with increased. The stories did not necessarily focus on physical, learning or general disabilities or abilities – but rather gave an overall feeling that the mothers did not see their children as being the same as everyone else, and worried about them not being valued for their talents. Mosa and Marie both articulated significant concerns about

children with differences: Marie because of her son's special needs and Mosa because of her son's sporting ability.

... I was very worried that they would not get him, he has a different outlook on the world and I worry that a new school would not understand him as well (Mosa)

... I want him to cope like everyone else will, but he doesn't, he can't and I worry about that. (Marie)

These expressions of difference were common amongst the mothers interviewed and many of them talked about how their child was different. I think mothers felt that they have some kind of specialised knowledge relating to their children, which had been carefully passed to their primary school teachers during the frequent communication that they had had over the many years, but they felt would now be lost in the vast secondary school (Bugental & Happaney, 2002). However, it is also evidence of mothers fighting for the right thing for their children and worrying that they are not doing enough to secure the best for them, which is something that is expected during a child's educational journey and the dominant discourses (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). However, there is more to it than just what is best for the child; it is the cultural dominance that the self comes first which I believe is driving this behaviour. These expressions of difference could be due to what Twenge (2014) calls the narcissistic epidemic – a generation of children who are entitled and believe that they can do anything; because their parents and the world tell them they can. Mothers follow the accepted social script of making their children the centre of attention: raising their expectations and making them believe that they are special – which both

the children and the mothers carry through the children's life and schooling careers and these expectations formed part of many of the mother's stories. This engagement with the accepted dominant discourses becomes critical to the performance of motherhood during this transitional stage and it is clear, is central to the choices made.

Worry About Whether I Have Made The Right Choice

All of the mothers who took part in the research made a choice for their children. For some, the choice process was complicated and engaging, for others, it was more simplistic. However, choice was the common theme running through the interviews. Therefore, it was not surprising that many of the mothers talked about worrying about whether they had made the right choice for their children. For Angie, when she was interviewed her son had already started secondary school; however, she still expressed worry about this choice:

... I still worry about it, I think about how he is doing and stuff all the time, but I think I did it right (Angie)

For Rowyn, the worry about whether she had made the right choice manifested itself in elevated feelings about her daughter and a sense of guilt which accompanied these. For Rowyn, she felt that she didn't give her daughter access to the fee-paying school that she wanted to attend. Because both mother and daughter felt that she would have done so much better at the fee-paying school, there was a constant sense of anxiety about the choice that was made:

...I do feel anxious, every day she comes home from school it makes me feel sick some days... yeah I think each day goes I have still got that feeling of anxiety and dread, it's far easier than in the first few weeks. (Rowyn)

The choice of secondary school is long-range, i.e. something you don't get all of the information for until much later. Therefore, because the results of choice are only partially complete (i.e. none of the children had received any examination results or had successfully finished school), the mothers were still anxious about whether the choice was right or not. Despite the time, energy and emotion that goes into the process, mothers continue to be anxious until the process is complete. The anxiety evident in Rowyn's and Angie's stories confirms the ideas of Wilkins and Olmedo (2016) who found that parents adopting responsibility for the risk and liabilities inherent in the school choice process encourages anxiety and uncertainty. Olmedo and Wilkins (2016) explain this as disciplining parents into the right behaviours and reading the mothers stories shows that they are embodying this responsibility and bearing the effects of it through anxiety and worry.

Grief/Loss

The negative emotions expressed by the women surrounding pain and loss were universal. Grief was not articulated in a hopeless way, but rather in a sense that they were grieving for the younger child that they had lost and were not going to get back. There are three ways that the mothers communicated grief and loss: through the language they used, their expressions of loss and the acceptance of something

different. The sense of grief and loss is common in motherhood, with Empty Nest Syndrome being a frequent construct (Mitchell and Lovegreen 2009). However, the change in parenting duties that mothers experience at this life transition was clearly felt.

Language

As expected, the mothers talked in a diverse way about their children and themselves. However, when it came to the emotion of grief and loss, many of the mothers used the word 'baby' to refer to their children. For some, this was a way of differentiating how children grow and describing what they had lost as mothers, while for others it was a way of distinguishing the 'new' children they had acquired as they matured. Below are some of the ways that the mothers used the word 'baby' to represent their children:

...I was no longer there with my baby boy (Angie)

...Callum is my baby and I don't think I am ready to let go of him yet (Hannah)

...I hated it because that's my baby for one going to school (Stella)

...it's probably that she is my baby and she probably always will be (Rowyn)

It was a term used by many of the mothers that it is worthy of mention. I consider that the term wedds these mothers towards their performance of motherhood and provides a sense that they have not yet moved from being the mother of small children. It is

notable that most of the mothers that referred to their children as 'babies' (7 out of 15) were the mothers that had been through more difficult or problematic transitions and were, therefore, reworking their performance as mothers in a more fundamental way than those who had less stressful transitions.

Loss

Most of the mothers talked about loss at some stage in the process. For many, this emotion was an emotion that they had at the point of transition and when the mothers felt that something they had previously had gone. For Amelia, the sense of loss was finite, as she viewed it as losing something of her son that she would never get back:

...I am thinking that a whole part of me will be going to big school with him and I won't ever get that back (Amelia)

The emotion of loss that Amelia felt was really about herself and the part of motherhood that she would no longer perform because her son was getting older and partly to do with reorientation of her performance to incorporate this 'loss' of motherhood. For Angie, it was a similar sentiment:

...I was losing a part of my son and some of the control I had over his upbringing (Angie)

For Deb, she recognised that her son was growing and that she would be losing part of who he was, but predicted that she hadn't lost him quite yet. Many of the mothers echoed this in a similar sentiment:

...but I haven't lost him completely yet to the 'grunts' and the bedroom (Deb)

The emotion of loss is not something unanticipated in this research. When children go to secondary school this represents a watershed for mothers, who take on a different and less intensive set of duties to the primary school mother. However, this is expressed as loss, rather than freedom from the ties of being the mother of a young child. I believe the mothers' were not ready for the speed of change in their children and reorientating themselves towards being the mother of an older child was not something that they are prepared for.

Accepting Someone Different

The final aspect of the negative emotions was represented as grief by the mothers for the child that had gone and having to accept something new in their place. The mothers talked about not recognising their children, not being familiar with their voices and losing touch with their hobbies, etc. The mothers told their stories about this with a mild sense of grief about these new people in their lives and not with much excitement. For Scarlett, she was having difficulty in watching her son mature and become somebody different:

...so I think I find it difficult letting him grow up maybe, errm and realise that he is nearly a teenager (Scarlett)

While for Angie and Rowyn, this was represented in a more physical way:

...in some ways, like I lost something and got something else. Sometimes I don't even recognise him, I go and pick him up from places and I have to really look for him because I don't see him quickly, or when he picks up the phone and I don't recognise his voice because it's got so deep and that's a bit spooky, its like a stranger living in my house and eating the contents of the fridge, you know, but really when I sit down and talk to him he is still there, he is still Connor under all the grunts and moans. (Angie)

...[she is a] Completely different child almost, that is what I feel. (Rowyn)

The emotions that the mothers expressed here are a repeat of the expansion that they would have gone through to incorporate a newborn into their lives, a new person whom they had to integrate– except that, this time, they have to do it with their child moving between stages. It created emotions in the mothers, which were negative and difficult to deal with, but expressed with an awareness of acceptance of the life transitions that a child must go through.

Judgment

Judging, being judged and the perception of judgment from other mothers was a strong theme in the interviews. The type of judgments fell into three categories: judging one's own parents for their decisions, judging other mothers for the decisions they made and being judged as a mother for making decisions. It is worth considering here that most of the primary schools that the children attended were small as were the corresponding communities of mothers, there was clear sharing of community

and domestic space. Many of the mothers were talking about people they had known for many years, and their judgments of them/perceptions of judgments about them were based on long-term relationships.

Many of the mothers judged those who did the 'easy thing' and created an ambivalent transition for their children, going from the local primary school to the nearest catchment area school:

... At his primary the kids just seemed to go to the local secondary and the parents weren't taking stuff into consideration, we weren't happy with the secondary school options that were available (Angie)

...therefore, if those parents haven't looked around or judged what is right or wrong what does that say about them as parents? (Marie)

Here, Angie is relating that the ambivalent transition, in her opinion, was not the best option for all children and especially not hers. This could be some kind of cognitive justification for making a different choice. Also, positioning this as her doing the right thing for her child, while contemplating that other parents were not doing the same things. This is the lived experience of the 'good mother' narrative, where the mother is doing something different for her children to be the best she can.

The second way that judgment came into the picture was that of mothers feeling judged about the decisions they were making. There were many references to judgment during the interviews and all mothers talked about it at some point:

... she looked down her nose at all of us I guess because she was doing the best for her kid and wanted to know why we all were not (Amelia)

.... I know people judge me all the time and to be honest I am secretly judging them too, but it's like you never say anything do you? (Hannah)

Both Amelia and Hannah talk in difficult ways about being judged by other mothers, although they relate only feelings about what they perceived other people thought. Psychologically, there is an element of justification of decisions, and the mothers are reflecting more on their own decisions rather than on the decisions of others.

The third type of judgment referred to is that which the mothers made about their own parents. Here, there is something of a sense of historical change; many of the mothers looked back, considering that choice is something new and not an option that was open to them (or their parents) when they were growing up. As they considered the decisions they made for their own children, this gave space for reflection about their past:

...the school I went to was pretty much determined because it was my local school, my parents hadn't really thought about any others schools in the area and it was just assumed that I was going to go to the local school so I did (Angie)

... I in contrast am very interested in where my children go to school and what type of education my kids get. When I think back about it, my mum and dad weren't that interested (Angie)

These judgments that the mothers expressed, I believe are orientated away from a sense of shame; shame in not doing the 'right thing' and providing the 'right choice' for their children. Scheff (1988) considered that shame (and the avoidance of shame) is the basis of much conformity producing behaviours in individuals and although the mothers did not express shame as one of their emotions, their feelings of judgment are part of shame avoidance. This particular emotion functions well within the Neoliberal policies of school choice because it orientates peoples behavior to take personal responsibility and do the right thing, harnessing the emotions of individuals concerned and manipulating them to meet the needs of the system (well educated, motivated and qualified students who will meet the needs of the state as part of the workforce on graduation) (Lupton 1998). In this sense, the emotions that the mothers are feeling and that are orientating their choices can be associated with power as they work within the dominant discourses to fit the social systems they exist in (Foucault 1971).

Summary

The analysis of the role of emotion shows that it was not only central to the women's stories but also to how they performed motherhood. Although negative emotions were by far the most frequently expressed, this did not always stem from the school choice process, but rather from the way that motherhood was performed within the

constricted education system and the choices, which define it. Negative emotion is part of a wider trend in society in our reactions to risk, choice and performance and the school choice process was seen in this analysis to be an intersection where all three of these meet – therefore creating, as it were a perfect storm. This analysis also shows that mothers go through significant disturbance during this time and not only reevaluate themselves as mothers but also as partners, members of their communities and their life choices. This shows that the school choice process is a watershed in a mothers life which catalyses change and is, therefore, an important life event.

Chapter 9

Conclusions And Implications

The aim of this research was to investigate the performance of motherhood and its relationship to the school choice process during the transition of children to secondary school. The research argued that the transition from primary to secondary school was an important change in a mother and child's life and that this transition would affect the way that motherhood was performed. The way in which the transition is carried out with such a large significance attached to its success in England raises the stakes for the mothers involved and would heighten its effects on them. The research explored the experiences of 15 mothers who had recently been through or were going through, the school choice process to secondary school. A qualitative approach was used to gather the mothers' stories in their own words. Focusing on the experiences of these mothers created a space where their individual stories, voices and understanding were accepted as legitimate and important. The research found that there were three enduring themes affecting the women's' performance of motherhood during the transition: space and practices, relationships and emotions. Each of these themes influenced the mothers and their performance of motherhood in different ways, and these are concluded below.

A critical review of the literature revealed two aspects to the argument. Firstly, that the school choice process is dictated by policy and seen as something parents routinely should and want to do for their children (Exley 2011, Gewirtz 2001, Wilkins and Olmedo 2016). Making parents responsible for the school choice and ensuring they have the moral imperative is how policymakers and those who work in education

conceive school choice. Mothers do the majority of the work for this decision and spend significant time and effort investing into their children's life chances, by choosing the right school (David et al. 1993, 1994, 1997; Ball et al. 2004; O'Brien 2007). The literature also exposes the reality that some categories of mother, specifically those who are middle-class (Gewirtz et al. 1995; Exley 2012b), are more able to choose than others. Middle-class factors such as location, finance, cultural capital which the middle classes tend to have, etc., gives some women more choice and potentially more success with their choices than others. This bias results in difficulty for some mothers who undertake significant work in making the choices but are limited for a multitude of reasons in making the 'right' choice for their children.

Following this, a review of the literature on motherhood revealed the second part of the argument. Women gain some of their performance of motherhood from the relationship they have with their children (Surry 1985) and their caregiving role and life transitions of the child having an impact on the mother seems a consistent finding (Reynolds, Weissberg & Kaspro 1992; Dockett and Perry 2005b; Margetts 2002b; Li et al. 2012; Lilley 2014). The way that the school choice process is examined and portrayed in some of the literature, masks the structural inequalities of the process upon mothers and represents the process as not having any impact on the performance of motherhood with recent research still referring only to parents and not mothers (Burgess et al 2014, Bagley & Hillyard 2015, Trevena, McGhee, and Heath 2016, McCarthy 2016). However, when the mothers presented their stories, the experiences reveal a more complex experience.

Summary Of Findings

My first aim was to explore how mothers engaged with the school choice process.

There is previous literature on engagement (Ball and Vincent 1998, 2001; Gorard 1996; Taylor 2002; Fitz et al. 2002) and several pieces of research on the behaviours associated with school choice (Coldron et al. 2008; Francis and Hutchings 2013).

However, there is little that focuses specifically on mothers' personal experiences.

Mothers seem to exist in a world where they are addressed in the school choice process, but as a parent, not a mother. This lack of recognition was something many of the mothers were aware of; it was discussed regarding their feelings and needs as mothers being ignored during the process and treated as an addition, rather than as a critical part. It is not that the mothers felt isolated; rather they felt unnecessary and did not appreciate being treated that way.

The women's stories suggested that they all engaged with the school choice process to some degree or another. For some, the engagement defined this period in their lives while, for others, it was less important, but they all engaged. The performance of motherhood was influenced by the 'Good Mother' narratives (Arendell 1999; Goodwin and Huppertz 2010), showing that, by engaging with the school choice process, it is the 'right' thing to do – or, as O'Brien (2005) suggested, the things that mothers 'should' and 'must' do. This is illustrated in Hannah's and Angie's stories, who expressed concerns that they wouldn't have been good mothers if they did not take such an interest and have been engaged. The inclination of the mothers to engage and do the majority of the work supports the previous research reviewed in chapter 4 in the way that all of the research showed that mothers took the major role in the choice of

school for their children and undertook significant educational carework (O'Brien 2005, 2007; Wilkins 2010, 2011; David et al. 1994). The way that the mothers in this research talked about how space and practices affected their choice and the strength of emotion, which the mothers outlined in chapter 8, are all in line with previous research. One element of engagement found that runs counter to the conventional wisdom in the literature is that of the ambivalent transition – a prevailing theme in the analysis of space. This finding presents a challenge to previous research. It could be that the theme of ambivalence may occur because of the way that the educational market works in rural areas and the limited competition between secondary schools. Ambivalence was a choice with few risks, whereas in competitive, urban location it would be a far riskier option.

In relation to this aim, the mothers' stories also show that they engage early, suggesting cultural norms of engagement as important for mothers (as they perceive it) and the education of the child as being paramount to the mother and central to the family. Many of the women interviewed started to engage with the process before their children were born, moving house to ensure they were able to secure what they needed for their children. The narratives of Hannah, Lucy and Mosa, referred to an implicit understanding that, to get the best for their child, they needed to have up to date, accurate information about schools and the process. Suggesting that the construction of the duty of a good mother was defined, at least in part, by preparedness. The mother's stories of early engagement seem consistent with research on the discourses of mothering discussed in chapter 4, specifically Hays (1996), Arendell (2000) and Goodwin and Huppertz (2010). The previous research suggests that dominant discourses of mothering which feature preparedness, giving

yourself to the child completely and doing everything possible to secure advantage for them in the performance of motherhood were pervasive. This finding is compatible as it suggests that the mothers in the research all engaged with the process, therefore following the discourses of the Good Mother and from this seemed to know what was expected of them in their performance of motherhood at this stage. The finding that none of the women rejected these dominant discourses follows closely from Foucault's work in that the mothers understood what was expected of them and partook of the activities and processes required. The analysis from the chapters on space showed the detail with which these women engaged and the negotiations they went through to follow the dominant discourse and the strength of emotions, which were evident in Chapter 8 showed how they felt about this.

The extent and timing of engagement differed along individual lines; however, all of the mothers, regardless of their situation, tried hard to understand the process and make it work for their children. This effort was borne out in the range of activities that mothers took part in (both organised, as part of the formal school choice process or something they chose to do independently). While social/cultural constructions of motherhood are split on mother effort (e.g. some view it as the only way to be a good mother, while others define over-mothering as a negative thing), the mothers in the research undertook these activities in order to create a future for their children and their families.

The degree to which these women understood themselves as operating within the educational marketplace was unconvincing. Although many of them recognised the various individual elements of the sales process, such as persuasive literature,

promotional events or sales strategies; they also recognised the lack of other elements such as loyalty, recognition or customer service that they would have expected from other marketplaces. This recognition of the market is broadly in line with some of the research noted in chapter 3 that parents do partially understand the market and operate to maximise the benefit from it (Ball 2003, Wilkins 2011, O'Brien 2007).

In summary the findings from the research relating to research objective one suggest that the mothers engaged fully with the school choice process, engaged early, engaged in a range of activities and tasks, tried hard to understand the process and tried to secure the choice right for their children. They undertook a range of activities both those, which were formally provided by local schools, local authorities, etc. but also those they chose themselves.

My next aim was to explore if the performance of motherhood was transformed or redefined due to engagement with the school choice process. The literature on how women transform when becoming mothers gave an initial understanding of how the performance of motherhood might change or occur (Nicholson 1999; Benedek 1959; Trad 1991; Leifer 1977; Pines 1972; Ammaniti 1991), as did some literature surrounding mothers when children attend primary school for the first time (Reynolds, Weissberg and Kaspro 1992). However, there is little focus on the transformation of mothers during this life transition.

The mothers' stories left no doubt that the school choice process and children going to secondary school had an impact on their lives and the way they performed motherhood. The mothers all talked about this; however, there was no overall

consensus on it being either a wholly positive or negative experience. The redefinition in the performance of motherhood took many forms: losing part of their role as a mother, gaining more time and freedom, questioning their abilities and holding concurrent conflicting roles all featured. The women in this research all seemed tolerant yet reflective of these changes, talking about accepting rather than welcoming them. In terms of process, as expected, there was no set process of performance transformation that the women went through – no model or linear changes. The individual nature of the changes in the performance of motherhood closely follow Butlers' (1990) ideas in that there are no 'a priori' characteristics of 'mother' therefore mothers are determining their individual performances by adapting to the social and cultural norms of society. The fluidity in which this role is performed represents impermanence, as situations, norms and values change with the transition. An additional finding of the research in Chapter 8 was that of judgment in the ways that mothers judged themselves, others and perceived the judgment of others. This judgment is a manifestation of the policing of the performance of identity in society, which keeps us within the dominant discourses and in line with social and cultural norms. This research is consistent with Foucault and Butler's research on the control of identity and performance in society.

The transition process was a catalyst for all the mothers in the exploration of their performance of motherhood. For many of them, they did not expect to be redefining themselves at this point and discussed the speed of change as a surprise. What was evident was that the school choice process and transition acted as a stimulus for all of the mothers and, in this sense, the experience was shared.

Mothers' reflections were all different, but their stories show a common relationship between the amount of change and where the transition child sat in the family structure. Women working to transition their youngest children to secondary school talked about having a greater need for adaption and introspection. They discussed not being needed, about losing part of motherhood, and not carrying out practical tasks for their children such as fastening their coats or walking them to school. Those with younger children at primary school seem to suffer less as much as they still seemed to be anchored strongly to a particular performance of motherhood by their younger children – although several of them talked about how they would feel when the youngest child transitioned. This difference shows that the youngest children entering a life phase, which is defined by independence, maturity and growing up, has a significant impact on the way that mothers define themselves, whereas the impact was less for eldest or middle children. Concluding that the performance of motherhood can be linked to practical tasks as well as emotional reflection.

The way in which the mothers defined themselves and their performance of motherhood was a private matter. At no point did any of the women talk about discussing how they felt or changes to how they view themselves with other mothers or people – including their own mothers. They did spend time thinking about why other women made the choices they did and in a less than supportive way (Ruddick 2001; Spigel and Baraister 2009; Douglas and Michaels 2004). Therefore, I would conclude that thinking about the performance of motherhood and its transformation for these women was a private matter.

In summary, for the second research objective, I found that all of the mothers went through a private period of a redefinition of motherhood performance associated with the school choice process. Also, that their experiences depended greatly on the age of other children in the family.

The final aim was to explore whether these experiences were shared between the mothers. Regarding engaging with the school choice process, all mothers who took part in the research engaged; although many of the women had taken part in several types of activities, they did not engage with it in the same way as already discussed. So, in terms of sharing the same experience, this was not a finding of the research, as the way engagement occurred depended more on the women's situation rather than the features of the school choice process. Regarding the way government policy is implemented, this is a critical finding. The process is a blunt instrument for most families going through it and assumes the same experiences and choices for all. However, it does not consider the discrete factors that mitigate the process for individuals and, therefore, it cannot operate to place all children in the best school for their needs. The bias in the process is supported by earlier research by Gewirtz et al. (1995) and Exley (2012a), who have shown that some parental groups find it easier to operate the process and, therefore, can get more out of it for their children, leading to some families being served unfairly by it.

Secondly, in terms of whether women share the change or transformation in their performance of motherhood during the school choice process, it was a finding of this research that all of the mothers did, to some degree, have a transformation in their performance, and all of them reflected on it during the interviews. As expected, the

change was greater for some women than others and, while many thought and prepared for it; others only did so during the interview. For me, this meant that many mothers are so used to putting other people first that they see working on their own performance as something indulgent. Therefore, change and transformation events often creep up on them, and they can be unprepared for what these changes might bring.

An additional part of this aim was to determine not only whether it was a shared experience, but also to establish whether the women shared it with others. The research found substantial evidence of the importance of relationships between the mothers and friends, partners, authority, schools, etc., but the most discussed relationship was with the transition child. The mothers talked warmly about sharing the experience with their transition child and about the positive and negative ways that this affected them both and how it affected their own performance as mothers. Previous research had indicated that mothers shared much of the school choice process in discussion with other mothers, especially those they would meet at the school gates (Ball and Vincent 1998; Gewirtz et al. 1995). However, that finding was not replicated in this research, while only trivial and fleeting mentions were made of other parents, none of these relationships with other mothers was significant in any way.

While not the primary focus of the research, I was interested in the way that the mothers operated in the educational marketplace and about how they framed their choices, both cognitively and behaviourally. This dominated the discussion of some mothers. The whole theme of space threw up some interesting ideas about how the

mothers experienced choice (and how they framed it cognitively), which, in turn, gave me noteworthy contextualization for the mothers' work on their own performance.

One of the findings which was not unexpected but held more significance for the women, was that of 'the assumption of the local'. The mothers discussed their rights to a good local education for their children at a school, which ideally they could walk to. This led mothers to discover much about how their performance of motherhood worked as members of the local community and was an aspect of motherhood performance that resonated with all of the women. Although the local aspect did not dominate their performance, the fact that all women took it into consideration suggests that living in a rural area may have formed a significant part of life and few were unwilling to embrace the isolation that came from not being local or a member of the local community.

Participating in the research was viewed by some of the women as a way to claim a voice in the school choice process, which they considered themselves invisible. This is an opportunity seldom afforded to mothers at this stage in their children's lives, as they grow more independent with an autonomous voice. When independence starts to occur, mothers seem to lose some importance as indicated in the literature and, in society, are viewed as nothing more than peripheral caregivers. These women, in gaining a voice, noted that they had not been asked before and had also thought themselves isolated by the process. In the interviews, there were many occasions of tears when mothers started to reflect on times lost and futures yet decided. Many of them expressed anger at being pushed out of their children's lives and sadness at a role that they had now lost. The way that the school choice process is legislated for

and administered by local and central government marginalises the voice of mothers while, at all times, underlies their responsibilities, telling them that they are accountable for their choices and, therefore, their children's futures.

This research shows that the school choice process is more than just a form-filling exercise for most mothers. There needs to be some place made for the voices of mothers as end users of this process and their role within it. Until this is achieved, the effects of what, to many, is a simple and benign piece of policy will not be fully understood and may be standing in the way of progress for secondary education in England and affecting the lives of mothers.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this research which potentially affected the findings. The first of these is the sample size and lack of variety. The number of women that volunteered to be interviewed was small in comparison to the number of children who had transitioned to secondary school in the last five years. The small sample size led to there being little ethnic diversity or diversity in family style/structure. Traditional two-parent families accounted for 80% of the women and in only two of these families was there an only child. If a wider range of women could have been interviewed, then a greater understanding of the impact of school choice could have been established. It is also worth noting that the area within which the research took place has a high population of Eastern European settled community members and, although their children may not yet have entered the school choice process, their inclusion in future research would give valuable information on the different ways

that the school choice process is negotiated by different cultural groups.

Accessing the population of mothers whose children had been through the school choice process recently or who were going through the process proved harder than I considered it would be. Although the access strategy aimed to target approximately 4890 mothers, only 38 came forward to ask for more information. It is possible that many of the mothers did not come forward because they did not feel that they had a story to tell or that their experiences were not valuable. Therefore this population was harder to reach than I expected and to get a wider and more diverse sample, would involve a different strategy.

As is always the case with qualitative research, many of the women who came forward to be interviewed had significant stories to tell; therefore, there were a relatively high proportion of problematic transitions and some unhappy stories. Many women who did not see their stories as interesting or problematic may not have come forward and, therefore, their stories are missing from the findings.

The research interviewed women who were going through the transition with their children or had been through it in the last five years. Only four of the participants were currently going through the process, with the other 11 being between 1-5 years' post-transition. This means that many of the women were relying on their memories of how they felt and not wholly reliable. Also, the raw quality of the memories can fade, leading to less emphasis being placed on the emotional responses than with more recently experienced memories.

A further limitation of this research is that there may have been a loss of data or information that occurred outside of the narrative structure. The stories of the mothers provided lots of detailed information; however, there may have been additional information that they didn't impart because it didn't fit with the stories they were telling. Although any potentially missing data may have changed the trajectories of the stories, I am confident that the complete analysis undertaken on the transcripts did the mothers stories justice and captured their performance of motherhood during the school choice process.

Reflections on what I would have done differently

If the research were to be conducted again, there are several things I would do differently. Firstly I would carry out the research over a longer period of time, probably trying to follow the same mothers going through the process from September, the very start of the school choice process through to March of the following year and the time of the national offer day, where children find out what schools they have been allocated. By doing this and following the mothers through the process, I would have access to data and reflections at the time they were happening, rather than relying on memory and also capture the story as it was occurring. This longitudinal approach may elicit different performances of motherhood, which the mothers did not report in their stories during this research and also provide a richer, more detailed comparison of the mother's experiences.

I also would have kept a more reflexive and in-depth research journal during the process. Although I kept a journal, it was not complete and did not record enough

detail. I believe that keeping a more in-depth and detailed journal would enable me to identify the themes in the stories earlier and also how they intersected. It would also have illuminated some of the elements of the stories I chose to focus on and why by looking at the links between my experience and those of the mothers.

Implications for further research

The research has opened up other avenues for future investigations of parental involvement in the secondary school choice process in England, with a view to creating a deeper sense of understanding.

There is a need to consider the role of fathers in the school choice process. Although much of the literature focuses on mothers (David et al. 1993; David et al. 1997; David et al. 1994; Vincent, Ball, Kemp and Pietikainen 2004; O'Brien 2007; Wilkins 2011), and research has shown that they do most of the engagement with the process, there is a need to understand how and when fathers engage and what effect it has on them. For fathers, the policy is similarly gender-blind, as the process does not differentiate by gender; however, if fathers go through a similar process that this research indicates that mothers do, then this may have an effect on the family unit and create possible changes. This research could be replicated with fathers in order to explain how they engage with the process and whether any impact on the performance of fatherhood is evident.

This research focused on one small rural area, which had unique features.

Understanding the impact of the school choice process on groups operating in

different environments would add valuable insights to the debate. Absent from the research was the competitive narrative that much of the academic literature focuses on which tends occur in more urban areas (London, Hackney, Birmingham, etc.), where parents are fighting to get a place at their chosen school. The insights provided by comparing and contrasting the parental experiences in different geographical locations would be valuable and contribute to the body of literature on school choice and also illuminate the wider societal effects of the process.

While this research was only able to take a snapshot of the mothers' experiences, to understand the longitudinal effects of this critical life course transitions to mothers, follow-up research could be completed at 5, 10, 15 years post-process. The women in this research view their children as going to secondary school as a major transition in their lives and yet it is notably absent from the academic literature. Research focusing on the importance, effects and reflections on this transition in the later life of the mothers would help to understand whether the impacts are long or short-term, or whether they are relatively minor or will have greater significance. The way in which individuals interact with government policy is always going to be an area of human interest. However, more research that illuminates the effects of this interaction in educational policy is the best method to ensure that the policy works for all of those involved and, therefore, adds value to society where secondary education is crucial to everybody's future success.

Reflections On Professional Practice

The education system has different ways of working with parents to engage them during the education of their children and research has shown that this is effective in raising the achievement of the children concerned (McNeal, 2015, Grolnick 2016, Von Otter & Sten-Åke Stenberg 2015). Therefore, there are some implications that this research raises and reflections on the way that schools, local authority and society handle the transition in general.

Firstly, as the research found that mothers all engaged with the school choice process, it means that schools and the local authority need to recognise that this is something, which can consume mothers for a time, and that significant effort goes into it.

Therefore, both schools and local authorities should be working on providing support options for parents, but also specifically aimed at mothers to keep them engaged and to help them make the right choices for their children. There are some support options offered in the local area the research was completed in. However, some of the mothers commented on the inadequacy of these. Therefore, current gaps in support should be filled to recognise the effort and need for information that mothers have.

Secondly, the research found that the school choice process and the way in which mothers engaged with it had an impact on their lives. This impact was not all tied up with the process, but rather as a life event, which signalled changes to their role as a mother. I think mothers need to be better prepared for the changes that occur at during this transition and there is a place for more school/health/social education programmes, which seek to provide some resources and acknowledgement of this

change. Schools could see a positive improvement if they were able to include support as it may improve communications and allow mothers to feel part of the community of the secondary school which is something that was portrayed negatively by the mothers in this research

We have, as a system recently started to place more recognition on parents as stakeholders, but there is more that can be done on a practical day-to-day level as well as on a strategic level to recognize the input of mothers, and I feel that if we can do this effectively it would improve parental and community relationships as well as increase achievement.

Reflections on my own learning

On reflection, I have found that there is an emotional toll you have to pay to immerse yourself in the stories of others. This narrative empathy was both engaging and troublesome. In many ways, I was reliving some of the emotional situations that the mothers had been through and described to me and doing that over and over again on a daily basis. Being so involved in another person's narrative, caused some personal distress as the research continued. The absorption was real and I felt bound up in the stories. The effects of this narrative empathy have been a different way of reading the stories and interpreting them. Although I aimed not to let my story become entwined with those told by the mothers, the empathy for their stories created entanglement between my story and theirs. This was a tiring process, and I have learned that it was difficult to complete. I feel that in many ways the mother's stories have become a part of who I am, and are not disembodied research data. This emotional toll provided me

with a heightened sense of moral responsibility to the mothers and their stories. I am happy that this was an effect of the narrative empathy and it has allowed me to gain a far deeper understanding of the mother's stories than I would have had if I had not have been through the process myself.

Undertaking this research has allowed me to recognise and identify my own performance of motherhood, where it comes from, how it was created and formed and how it grows and changes. This contemplation has uncovered some hidden ideologies, assumptions and values which shape my performance of motherhood, but I wasn't conscious of. Uncovering these assumptions, beliefs and values has been beneficial for me and for the way I conducted the research. For example, I uncovered a sense of judgment that I applied almost implicitly about mothers and their actions and that these judgemental perspectives came from my high expectations of people. Once I uncovered these, I was able to challenge them within my analysis and check myself to ensure I was less prejudiced in my analysis.

Conducting qualitative research and interviewing is not something that I found easy and I have been through a journey to learn how best to elicit stories from the mothers I interviewed. When I began interviewing, although my aim was always to get the narratives in the rawest form and in the mother's own words; during the first few interviews, this proved outside of my skillset, and it didn't come naturally. The first few interviews, therefore, involved me asking the mothers lots of questions, rather than letting the story come out naturally. After some input, training and reading, I learned how to perfect my technique and get at the stories. My technique became better, and I got closer to the data I wanted.

Contributions Of This Research

My research has made the following contributions to the literature on how motherhood is performed and operates through the school choice process:

Firstly, the mothers felt a clear impact of the school choice process on the ways that they performed motherhood and this research paints a picture of this impact as a major life transition rather than as a series of tasks and activities that mothers go through. This research positions the transition as something more reflexive which has more impact than previous research had recognised and could be used to help mothers navigate the process in an increasingly competitive educational environment.

Secondly, the importance of space in the stories of the women links the performativity of motherhood to the local area and community in a significant way. Concluding that mothers gain something integral from their local area which contributes to their sense of self and performance.

Lastly the frequency of the ambivalent transition is not something noted in the literature before, and as a result, this finding should further explain some of the motivations which contribute to the choice of school, especially in the choice of local schools who don't perform highly. The ambivalent transition could be holding back some gains in educational performance for children whose mothers undertake an ambivalent transition.

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List of Appendices

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Appendix A



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Keele University
Keele
Staffordshire
ST55BG

14th September 2014

*** ***** ** Academy

***** **

Dear *** ***,

My name is Helen O'Neill and I am a postgraduate student with the University of Keele.

I am currently doing some research into the way in which the transition between primary and secondary school affect the mother of the child involved and the wider family environment. This research is being carried out in the ***** area.

I am looking to recruit some mothers who would be willing to talk about their experiences of going through the school choice process, choosing schools and the effects that this has had on themselves, their children and the family.

I would like to ask for your assistance with this. Would it be possible to ask if you would be willing to put a letter in the book bags of your Year 6 students, addressed to parents asking if any mothers would be willing to take part in the research? We would provide all of the printed materials in order to do this and you are welcome to have sight of all documents beforehand.

I fully understand that this is not something that you may be prepared to undertake for us, however I would be grateful if you could assist in any way to help us recruit participants for this research.

If there is any information I can provide you with to help you make a decision please do ask and I would be more than happy to come and introduce myself to you and explain more about the research if you feel that would be helpful as I am based locally.

I can be contacted by phone: 07881820334 or by email: h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk if you would like to ask any questions.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill

Appendix B



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Keele University
Keele
Staffordshire
ST55BG

14th September 2014

Dear *** ***,

My name is Helen O'Neill and I am a postgraduate student with the University of Keele.

I am currently doing some research into the way in which the transition between primary and secondary school affect the mother of the child involved and the wider family environment. This research is being carried out in the ***** area.

I am looking to recruit some mothers who would be willing to talk about their experiences of going through the school choice process, choosing schools and the effects that this has had on themselves, their children and the family.

I would like to ask for your assistance with this. Would it be possible to ask if you would be willing to ask your Year 7 students to take a letter home or provide electronic communication via email/parentmail etc., addressed to parents asking if any mothers would be willing to take part in the research? We would provide all of the printed materials in order to do this and you are welcome to have sight of all documents beforehand.

I fully understand that this is not something that you may be prepared to undertake for us, however I would be grateful if you could assist in any way to help us recruit participants for this research.

If there is any information I can provide you with to help you make a decision please do ask and I would be more than happy to come and introduce myself to you and explain more about the research if you feel that would be helpful as I am based locally.

I can be contacted by phone: 07881820334 or by email: h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk if you would like to ask any questions.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill

Appendix C



Are you the mother of a child who has moved between primary and secondary school in the last 5 years or is moving up next year?

We are recruiting for volunteers in the ***** area for a research study on the ways in which mothers respond to their children moving between primary and secondary school.

Volunteers need to be the mother of a child who has moved to secondary school in the last 5 years or going through the process of moving up next year.

If you would like to participate you will be asked to undertake a short interview that will take place locally at a time convenient to you.

All participation in the research is anonymous and all responses completely confidential.

If you have something to tell us about your experiences please do participate in this research.

For more details contact Helen on 07881820334 or h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk

Appendix D



Faculty of Humanities
and Social Sciences
Keele University
Keele
Staffordshire
ST5 5BG

Dear Participant

'Transforming Transitions': How do mothers' identities change when they engage with the school choice process.

I am a postgraduate research student from the University of Keele working on the EdD programme. I am interested in transition of children from primary school to secondary school and specifically the effects that this process has on the mothers of these children. I am contacting you to take part in this study called 'Transforming Transitions': How does mothers' identity change when they engage with the school choice process.

The study aims to find out what effects the school choice and transition process has on the identities of the mothers of children going through the process. I would like to try and identify what effects the transition has on the mother and the wider family environment.

If you agree to take part in this study, an interview time and date would be agreed and I would visit you in a convenient location and interview you about your experiences of your child transitioning from primary to secondary school. The interview should take no more than 2 hours, depending on the amount of information you wish to share and the time you have available. I have included a detailed information sheet about the study with this letter to give you a more thorough understanding of the study and its requirements.

If you have any questions, concerns or would like to discuss anything further, please don't hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor: Clare Holdsworth on the details given at the end of this letter.

If you would like to the opportunity to participate, please contact me by email (h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk) or telephone (07881820334)

The Participant Information Sheet is included.

Thank you very much for your time in reading this invitation letter.

I look forward to your participation in the study.

Yours Sincerely

Helen O'Neill

Supervisor : Clare Holdsworth

Email: c.m.holdsworth@keele.ac.uk

Email: h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk

Telephone: 07881820334

Appendix E



Information Sheet

Research Title:

'Transforming Transitions': How do mothers' identities change when they engage with the school choice process.

Aims of the Research:

The aim of this research is to understand the changes in mothers' identities as their child/ren move from primary to secondary school.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study 'Transforming transitions'. This research study is being undertaken by Helen O'Neill, a postgraduate student at Keele University.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

This research involves talking to mothers who fulfil the following criteria:

- You have been/or are going through the school choice process during the last 5 years
- You have considered the state school system in your decision process

During the research a minimum of 15 participants will be asked to take part in the research.

Your participation is voluntary. I would like you to consent to participate in this study as I believe that you can make an important contribution to the research.

Do I have to take part?

If you do not wish to participate you do not have to do anything in response to this request.

If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be interviewed and asked several questions relating to your experiences of choosing a secondary school for your child. The interview will take place in a location convenient to you, you will be reimbursed for any travel expenses incurred in travelling to the interview location. The interview will be conducted by myself and will be anonymous. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder if you permit it and interviews are likely to last approximately two hours depending on how much time you have available and how much information you are willing to share.

Depending on the data you give during the interview you may be contacted again for a second interview. If this is required I will contact you no longer than 1 month after your initial interview. The purpose of any second interview will be to clarify any points you have made and to ensure an accurate representation of your data.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no personal benefits to taking part in the research, you will be contributing to knowledge about the school choice and transition process and its effects on those who engage with it.

What are the risks of taking part?

There are no experimental procedures or physical risks involved in this study. Emotional, social and psychological risks are low. Questions are not intended to be very sensitive in nature, however you may elect to refrain from answering any of the questions and can terminate the interview at any time. I will be able to recommend additional sources of support if required.

How will information about me be used?

I will keep your personal information strictly confidential and will be known only to me. Your name and personal details will be stored securely and will not appear on any of the reports or publications that result from the research, and will be kept separately from the interview transcripts. The responses you provide may be used in my EdD Thesis. I may directly quote from the material given in the interview to help illustrate a point, or stimulate discussion, but I will ensure that people are not personally identifiable by the use of such quotations. (For example, any identifying names, places and institutions will be changed).

The responses provided in the interview may stimulate another interview. Therefore you may be contacted to discuss the responses you gave further.

Who will have access to information about me?

All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and in accordance with Keele Universities Data Management Policy. All interview recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research. Your name or any contact details will not be recorded on the interview transcripts. In addition, any details which potentially could identify you will also be removed or changed. My academic supervisors will have access to the anonymised transcripts of your interview, but I will be the only person to have access to the original recordings of the interview, your consent form and any of your contact details.

Your participation in this study will not be discussed with other interviewees. Your name will be changed in the research write up and I will ensure that your involvement remains entirely confidential and anonymous.

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored securely and on a password protected computer. You will not be able to be identified from the data stored. Your data will be stored for the duration of the EdD thesis process and then securely disposed of.

Who is funding and organising the research?

The research is based at Keele University as part of an EdD and is self-funded.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions. You should contact me on h.o'neill@ippm.keele.ac.uk Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact me you may contact my academic supervisor Professor Clare Holdsworth: c.m.holdsworth@keele.ac.uk, William Smith Building, Keele University, ST5 5BG.

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

Contact for further information

Helen O'Neill on h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk

Consent Form

Research Title: 'Transforming Transitions': How do mothers' identities change when they engage with the school choice process.

Name of Principal Investigator: Helen O'Neill

Contact details: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG
h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | I agree to take part in this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 | I agree to the interview being audio recorded | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 | I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
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<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
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Researcher	Signature	Date
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Consent Form

Research Title: 'Transforming Transitions': How do mothers' identities change when they engage with the school choice process.

Name of Principal Investigator: Helen O'Neill

Contact details: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG
h.o'neill@keele.ac.uk

Please tick the box if you agree with the statement

1 I agree for any quotes to be used ☐

2 I do not agree for any quotes to be used ☐

Name of
Participant

Signature

Date

Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix F



Interview Schedule (Themes)

Research Title: 'Transforming Transitions': How do mothers' identities change when they engage with the school choice process.

Theme 1

Key/Guiding questions

In what ways did you connect with the school choice process? What activities did you partake in? Did you do it alone or with your child/ren and /or family?

What is your background in schooling, did this in any way influence any of your decisions?

What influenced the decisions that you made for your child/ren?

Theme 2

Key/Guiding questions

How do you view yourself after going through the process?

What were your most memorable experiences during the process?

Would you make the same decisions again?

Theme 3

Key/Guiding questions

How has engaging with the school choice process affected relationships within the family and outside of the family?

How has your relationship with your son/daughter changed since you have been through the process?

Appendix G



'Transforming Transitions': How do mothers' identities change when they engage with the school choice process.
Biographical Information Questionnaire

Date of Birth:

Place of birth:

Marital Status: Single/Married/Separated/Widowed

Employment status: Full time employed/part time
employed/unemployed/Stay at home
parent/Self employed

Job Title (if applicable):

Partners employment status: Full time employed/part time
employed/unemployed/ Stay at home
parent/Self employed

Partners job title:

Number of children:

Children's DOB:
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Highest education level: GCSE or equivalent
A-level or equivalent

Diploma or equivalent
Degree or equivalent
Masters degree or equivalent
Higher degree or equivalent

What type of school did you attend:

State School/Private school/Other (please
specify below)

Appendix H

Pen Portraits Of The Mothers

Amelia

Amelia is a 45-year-old married mother of two children, one boy and one girl. Her older daughter had been through transition, and the younger one was just going to secondary school when she was interviewed. Amelia's story presented the process as straightforward and something she had done as a child but held opinions that she shouldn't have to choose and that children should be matched to schools depending on their abilities/potential by teachers rather than by parents.

Angie

Angie is a 40-year-old married mother of two children, both boys. The overwhelming theme of Angie's story was that of anxiety and worry, both with the school choice process and the effects of her son going to secondary school. She had a direct focus from the start on the performance of the school and this drove her to choose a school out of catchment, which involved a long journey for her son. Making different choices to that of other mothers made her conscious of the process and its effects.

Caroline

Caroline is a 43-year-old married mother of one. Although experienced in education through having been a secondary school teacher, she expressed significant anxiety throughout the choice process and described the threats and risks associated with moving schools. She also explained that, although funded private education had been made available to her daughter, she didn't take it due to her political views.

Deb

Deb is a 45-year-old married mother of three children. She has two sons at secondary school and one son moving up shortly. Her story was a positive one for the whole family and something which has worked out well for them. She expressed some anger at the communication and organisation of the school system, and that is something she has challenged and wants to change. She also expresses a concern with the blatant marketing and recruitment of places that occurs when her children transfer to secondary, with a lack of focus being placed on retention.

Hannah

Hannah is a 39-year-old married mother of two sons. She made a decision to send her son to state boarding school due to jobs which take her and her husband away from home. She described anxiety with the school choice process and anger that the government could not provide the right education on her doorstep. She told a story about how she believes that she made the right decision for her child, regardless of what others have thought.

Liz

Liz is a 48-year-old divorced mother of three children. Liz expressed some problems with the school choice process and secondary schools in general. Although her daughter still attends the local secondary school, this is a school from which she removed her middle daughter because of its failings and sent her away to live with her grandparents to attend a different school. She is always anxious about her youngest child and how the failings of the school affect her and what she might do to make things better. She is anxious for her daughters to achieve greater things than she perceives she has.

Stella

Stella is a 37-year-old single mother of three children, with the youngest being only a few months old. Stella has had a very difficult time during the transition period with her middle son and is still dealing with many of the problems that this has caused. She attributes much of the blame to the school, the head teachers and the council, and feels the impact of their decisions acutely on family life.

Lucy

Lucy is a married 42-year-old mother of two children. She works in educational services and was very engaged with the transitions of her two children from an early stage. She moved her family and job to get into the right school, which she had spent many years researching and considering, and which was against her husband's wishes. She has had a positive time with the transition, but mainly this is due to her decision-making process and commitment to it rather than anything else.

Marie

Marie is a 54-year-old married mother of five children. She has three older children from her first marriage and two younger children from her second. The forthcoming transition process for her son is proving more difficult as he is autistic and there have been added complications. The process has included significant work, activity and interaction with other services and Marie compares this with the relative simplicity of the moves of her older (non-autistic) children. She considers that the transition process has not been easy and has troubled her.

Mosa

Mosa is a 46-year-old married mother of three children. Her youngest son was going through the transition because of Mosa's new job and a house move. She was also going through the process of taking her youngest son out of the private system and putting him into the state system. Mosa expressed anxiety about the different ways in which the abilities of her son would be catered for in the two school systems but felt positive that there would not be many differences. There was a significant amount of change coming up for the whole family and moving schools, although this was important it did not seem like the most problematic aspect of it.

Rayna

Rayna is a 44-year-old married mother of two older children, one who has left secondary school entirely and another who is 16. Rayna works at the school she chose for both her children and feels positive and comfortable with that decision. There was very little anxiety or problems with the transition faced by Rayna, and everything was

entirely smooth. She did express a concern for the loss of the community at primary level, but accepted that, as she was in full-time employment, this did not affect her greatly.

Rowyn

Rowyn is a 37-year-old married mother of one daughter. She works full-time in a demanding, shift-based role, as does her husband, who is her daughter's step-father. Rowyn's daughter had disabilities which affected her transition to secondary school and this was made more difficult by the fact that both mother and daughter wanted her to attend the local independent grammar school, but financially this was not possible. Rowyn has suffered significant anxiety with her daughter moving school and this is still very raw.

Sabine

Sabine is a 43-year-old, married mother of two children. She moved from London when her children were small because she thought it would give them a better start in life. She works full-time. She has gone through a relatively easy transition with her eldest daughter but is considering that her youngest will be more difficult because she is not as traditionally bright as her eldest and thinks this may cause problems. She also suffers some anxiety surrounding the maturity of her two children and how the youngest has not matured as much as the eldest. She holds concerns about how this will affect the transition to secondary school, especially with transport and other logistical matters.

Scarlett

Scarlett is a 46-year-old married mother of two children. She has experience in the education system and moved her children several times during primary and, therefore, approached the secondary school transfer with strong views. She was struggling consciously with letting go of her children and maintaining some sense of control over their lives. However, she has managed a positive transition with the help of her husband and other friends/colleagues despite feeling judged by other parents about her choices and currently moving house because of this.

Sophie

Sophie is a 48-year-old mother of two children, both of whom have special needs. Sophie is separated from their father, who doesn't have much influence on their lives and lives some distance away. Sophie was nervous about her daughter's move to secondary school and was quite in touch with her needs and how she might be feeling. She experienced an unpleasant transition with her daughter but trusted the school to sort things out and deal with the issues as they arose.

Appendix I

Table: Summary Of Full List Of Emotions Expressed By Participants

<p>Positive Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luck• Relaxed	<p>Positive Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relief• Happiness• Satisfaction• Pride• Confidence• Excitement
<p>Negative Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety/Nervousness/Worry• Desperation• Guilt• Realisation• Loss• Agony• Loneliness• Selfishness• Scared/Fear• Hurt• Upset/angry/devastation• Dislike• Blamed• Apprehension• Struggle	<p>Negative Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety/Worry• Loss/grief• Distance• Sadness• Anger/upset• Hatred• Shame• Pressured• Drained• Shock• Overwhelmed

Appendix J

Additional Findings

Summary Of The Mothers Stories

All of the mothers in the study talked about their performances in order to explore whether the school choice process had any impact on the way they performed motherhood. The story of each mother will be considered in full to see where and how their performance of motherhood changed, to note any processes they went through, what these meant for them and whether this was shared. The purpose of this analysis is to give each of the women's complete stories a voice and to represent them fully.

Amelia – For Amelia, the transition of her youngest son to secondary school was a new phase in her life, but not something she was looking forward to. She realised that the relationship with her young son was changing and that, as a mother, she was losing part of her role:

...So it's a bit like, you know when they go to nursery or start school for the first time. It's not really like anything changed for me, but it kind of has because every time something like that happens you know, like a part of me, as a mother, stops being relevant. I was quite old when I had Regan and even older when I had Robbie, so every moment I have with them as their mother has been really precious, and when something changes or they do something new for the first time then I kind of, well, ermm, I lose a bit of that.
(Amelia)

The reflection of not being relevant anymore reveals that Amelia sees motherhood as a core part of herself and that her experiences as a mother are 'precious'. Amelia talks about gaining a new sense of freedom in her story and being able to do something else rather than just 'being a mum'. This suggests that the school choice process signals to some mums, like Amelia, that their mothering role is reducing and that her performance as a mother is changing with it. Amelia talks positively about filling the gap left by the child who is moving on, but admits it makes her feel bad:

Crap, well no, not really, but you know what I mean. It's like the last one in the house and I will have to go and do something else rather than be his mum. (Amelia)

For Amelia, it seems that she is holding on to her performance as a primary school mum, but realising that it will change and, in a sense, planning both emotionally and practically for this change. Her sense of who she is, is changing due to the school choice process and she can identify this in herself and make plans about it.

Angie – For Angie, the school choice process again signaled a change in her life. Angie describes it as losing a child and gaining another one; as such, she recognised that she wasn't needed as much as she used to be:

...almost became a second thought to him until the points when he realised he needed us and work started to build up for him, then he wanted us, but he only really leans on me now when he really needs me {laughs}.... (Angie)

For Angie, there was a sense of release from some maternal duties, but not all, as her son begins to develop his independence and recognises when he needs some external input. However, this sense of release was a surprise for Angie and something she was unprepared for:

...I have seen it change, I said before that it's not bad, just quite difficult to deal with really. I wasn't really expecting it and so, to be honest, it was a bit of a surprise... I suppose it was the point that I realised that I didn't need to be a full-time mum to him anymore (Angie)

For Angie, the way she performs motherhood is changing, but those changes not being planned for and being directly related to the transition. Angie was developing her performance as the mum of a young man, rather than a child, and experienced some difficulties in negotiating this:

...Sometimes I don't even recognise him, I go and pick him up from places and I have to really look for him because I don't see him quickly, or when he picks up the phone and I don't recognise his voice because it's got so deep and that's a bit spooky. It's like a stranger living in my house and eating the contents of the fridge, you know, but really when I sit down and talk to him he is still there, he is still Connor under all the grunts and moans (Angie)

So for Angie, performance of motherhood had changed and was led by her son's life transition to secondary school.

Caroline – Caroline was an educator, someone who had been in the secondary school system for some time, so for her the school choice process demanded her to choose between her performance as an educator and her performance as a mother. She describes being torn between these two competing performances, both of which demanded different actions from her (as she perceived it):

...No, I was completely torn, I think because, on one hand, I sort of, I mean Beechaven the school she didn't get into is a really nice school, the facilities are good and also it specialises in drama and Megan is very much that way inclined, whereas the one she has gone to is a, err, a technology college basically. It sort of specialises in that area so, in a sense, if you are going to look at those two things on the one hand as an educator I would have said, well that kid should be in that school over there because that is clearly her, you know, going to suit her needs better and because that is a better school because it's got all outstanding and it's now an academy and it's got better funding and the school buildings are better. It will attract a better type of teacher. Then, on the other hand, the mother in me said, you know, your daughter is actually better off with her friends, she is better making a shorter trip to school and home with people that she knows in a group of people rather than on her own and she can get a school bus if she wants to. Plus the nurturing process in terms of the transition from primary to secondary has been helped by that particular secondary school because they are actually coming into school and she will benefit from that, so it was kind of like, err, sort of intellectual decision versus an emotional one. (Caroline)

In the end, Caroline talked about why her performance as a mother won this battle, but it was not without its challenges. She talked through why she trusted her own

decisions and knew she had made the right choice; but also, part of her story was about her own political identity and how this guided the choice process:

...My politics and my own principles guided me, but in the dark night of the soul, I did question myself. Did I have any right for my politics and experience to colour this experience? But this is what I had to base my decisions upon, I could only do it based on that. (Caroline)

Caroline, like the other mothers, viewed the process as making her 'grow up' as a mother and her daughter not needing her as much as she used to. For Caroline, it seemed that her strong ideas guided her decision-making and, although she could identify the changes that she was going through as a mother, it was not evident that change was a major part in this.

Deb – Deb had a simpler transition, which she reflected was easier because she sent her son to the local school that she considered was very good. Her performance of motherhood was linked to her younger children and, therefore, although she considered that she was now the mother of a 'young man' rather than a child, she considered that her intensive mothering days were not over yet:

...I mean, I didn't think, oh my god, am I old or anything. I actually felt quite proud of the moment that he went and his looking quite smart and everything, he is taking a new step on a new adventure in his life. But yes, I just felt, I did have that feeling of, you know, my little boy is going, I am the mother of a young man now... but I still think I have young children actually. (Deb)

She explains it further:

...I think because the youngest is still at primary I still define myself as a parent with young children, ermm, and even though the eldest is 15, I just feel that they are still young, they are not ready to move out and everything else, so to me a parent of older children is kind of the post 18 stage and what have you. (Deb)

For Deb, she didn't see her performance of motherhood changing much at the secondary school stage and was planning more of a transformation when the children all reached 18. For Deb, she still had young children at home and, therefore, retained much of the world of mothering associated with the primary school, therefore able to perform motherhood in different with her children and not identifying with the transition as much as some other mothers had.

Hannah – Hannah's story was different to everyone else's as she was sending her son to boarding school. In terms of her performance, there was a strong theme of change running through the narrative linked to the maturity of her son:

...Callum is my baby and I don't think I am ready to let go of him yet. But yes, it has changed me, I am seeing him as a big boy now and in a different context. I think I am just waiting for that time when he stops calling me mummy, do you know what I mean? He will start calling me mum soon and stop kissing me... think we are both going to see a different boy walk through the door on the first half term back. I think you have to prepare yourself for that change whenever it comes, but the process of sending them to

secondary school is almost like the government's way of saying 'hey Mum, it's time to let go'. (Hannah)

Although Hannah recognised the change that was coming, her performance of motherhood was linked also to her younger son and she expressed some fears about what it would be like when he left. Hannah identified strongly as a working mother and expressed frustration with the processes all being set up to cater for 'at home' mothers, talking in relation to some of the transition events she could have attended being placed during the working day:

...That just smacks of being set up for mothers who don't work, which is a travesty in my books and I got angry about that. I don't know if I would have attended anyway.
(Hannah)

For Hannah, it seems that the part of her performance of motherhood of her eldest child was changing, but this was an upsetting experience for her and something she was having to 'come to terms with' rather than embracing as a positive change. However, she was also weaving this change in with her performance as a mother of a primary school child, which meant she felt torn between them a little bit and not in a stable place.

Stella – Both Stella and her son found the transition to secondary school and the school choice process a struggle. Some of this was because Stella was a single mother and coping with two children and a young baby and frustrated by a change to the school system in the area, which causes some extra logistical problems. Stella's

performance of motherhood was constantly challenged by her son going to secondary school; she coped badly, describing herself as a '*bad parent*' because of the problems her son was facing and how she felt powerless to address them:

...I feel like a bad parent most days to be honest, because if he comes home upset I don't know how to deal with him. I can't comfort him enough, and tell him that it's alright, that tomorrow's going to be another day. I'm not going to sit there and lie to my child that everything's going to be fine when it's far from fine. He can tell it's far from fine, I can't pick him up and cuddle him because he is too big, I can't take the pain away, I can't take the fear from him, I can't stop it. And I want to. (Stella)

For Stella, therefore, part of her performance of motherhood was being able to protect and nurture her son, which she was unable to do effectively with the problems he was facing. These challenges led Stella to reconsider motherhood and about what would happen when her children didn't need her at all:

...And that's my only fear as a single parent, that I am going to end up doing the Riverboat cruises on me Jackjones. You can invest so much time in your children, but eventually your children do grow up. You've got to have a plan for yourself as and when that time comes. (Stella)

It was the problems that her son was facing rather than the reality of the school choice process that affected Stella's performance. However, the transition acted as a catalyst and realities like the communication between her and her son dwindling, and losing

the 'sweet and kind' boy that he was, led Stella to reevaluate herself and who she was. This shows support for the idea that the performance of motherhood is created through the mothers' caring relationships (Hays 1999).

Liz – Liz's story was difficult – a single mum struggling with three children and a full-time job. She had sent her middle child away to live with her grandparents in order to get her a better education, but was fraught with guilt that she couldn't do this with her younger child due to several factors. The transition had caused Liz to focus on aspects of her performance of motherhood that had changed; these centred around how good a mother she was. Liz expresses that, at primary school, she was able to help her daughter with homework and be a 'good mum', but at secondary school she was unable to do much of this:

...Again, I felt shit because I wasn't there for my child, as I had to work. I worked a full-time job, some days I didn't get home until 9 o'clock at night. Sometimes, if she had homework, I wasn't there to help her, or I found out that homework wasn't done. You know, then I get told, by the school in a parents evening, you know you need to be there for your child, you need to teach your child for so many hours. (Liz)

Liz was angry and unhappy that she couldn't be there for her daughter and incorporated this into her performance as a 'bad mum'. A recurring theme in her story was that she couldn't do everything she was being asked to do and that secondary school changes the home life and children so much. Like many of the other mothers, although she didn't get much immediate release from her daughter going to secondary school, it was a catalyst to her looking forward and planning what she wanted to be:

...Yeah, I don't want to get old, but I do want to get old because I think when I'm old maybe my kids will be grown and I can just have some me time, being a parent, juggling work and having me time and I don't get me time. (Liz)

It was evident that Liz's performance and her measurement of herself as a mother had been challenged by the school choice process and the transition (as well as by life after the transition) and that she evaluated herself negatively against that. She did see herself as not performing against societal expectations or being able to perform as a good mother, which she clearly wanted to do.

Lucy – Lucy was a well prepared mother. Having looked for primary and secondary schools before her children were born, coupled with extensive research and school visits meant that Lucy was confident that she had secured the very best in secondary education for her children. The transition and the things that went with it did not come as a surprise to Lucy and her performance of motherhood was not as rocked as some other stories showed. She did, however, talk extensively about what external changes the transition had on her performance these centred around her reestablishment of the relationship with her husband and how her identification as an intensive mother lessened with this:

...we have started to talk about ourselves again, we talk to each other about things other than them... We had our 20th anniversary, we went away for the weekend and that was really fantastic and, ermm, that was really nice and again you have to learn to do it again. We'd have 15 years of kids kids kids. (Lucy)

For Lucy, she saw the transition as a natural part of being a mother and that she was very prepared for them becoming independent and going. Therefore, she had incorporated this into herself swiftly and become a mother of young men and being able to adapt her performance accordingly.

Marie – The story Marie had to tell was of something unfinished. Her son has autism and, therefore, her progression through motherhood was not as linear as it was for many; from her words, there was a sense that it would remain the same as it had been when he was a young child for a long time yet. She discussed how her demanding mother role had not eased with her son and that she had planned for him to remain with her forever. Although she talked positively about some of the more independent things that he was doing during the transition phase, the effects of these on her performance of motherhood were not all positive:

...things are already changing a bit really, I mean he is growing up a bit and spending a bit more time doing things on his own and really he doesn't need me... I guess then it's a bit sad and I think I will miss him a bit. (Marie)

So, in contrast to many of the other stories, Marie was not planning on her performance changing due to the transition. She did express some anxiety about not being able to protect her son in the new ventures he was having and, therefore, the lack of control made her feel less 'complete' as a mother. The process did not have the same effect on her performance as it did with some of the other mothers, as the transition was not entirely similar.

Mosa – The story that Mosa told was unique in the research because it was one of moving her son between the fee-paying and state sectors. However, it contained a lot of guilt and anxiety about her own abilities as a mother. The key incident in the story was that Mosa had taken another job in another county, meaning that her son could not attend the fee-paying school they had all planned on. Mosa knew that he was not going to be able to attend because of affordability, so she felt guilty that she was not living up to her role as a mother because of this:

...I will have to live with the fact that I will have affected his education and I don't know what effect that will have. It's not something that I thought I would do, you know, as a mother and not putting his best interests first, but I am having to do it and I don't like it.
(Mosa)

In addition, as the youngest child, Mosa did have some reflections on her performance as a mother overall, brought on by the fact that her youngest son was transitioning. These focused on what would happen when she was no longer an 'active mother' and the feelings that accompany that:

... you know, that he will move school and I am going to have an empty nest soon. That is something which is coming home to roost with me and it is very sad, because they are, none of them children anymore, they don't need me for as much, don't rely on me. (Mosa)

As in many of the other stories, there is a sense of release as the children move away from needing the mother so much, therefore creating a gap in mothers' performance

that is filled with some initial sadness. Whereas some of the mothers talked about filling the gap and even, to some extent, looking forward to it, I suspect that Mosa did not reflect on this because she worked full-time and had her time filled in other ways. Although her performance of motherhood was an issue in this case, it was more centred around the differences between the state and private educational spheres.

Rayna: The story that Rayna told was not pitted with the problems that many of the other mothers had faced; in fact, she talked warmly and positively of the transition and the secondary school environment. The one thing that had an impact on her performance throughout the process was the loss of the primary school. Rayna saw the small community at the primary school and its open door policy to be comforting and nurturing and mimicking her mothering of her children. However, she reflected that the loss of this when her eldest child joined secondary school was difficult:

...When I knew that would be the last time I went to primary, ermm, I guess so because for me I knew I wasn't having any more children, so as far as I was concerned, that was the end of the road for primary. It does make you quite sad, because the primary school environment is great, yeah, it's a welcoming environment, very approachable and you do miss the contact I would say. It does make you feel a bit emotionally drained. (Rayna)

So the catalyst for Rayna starting to perform as a mother of older children was the loss of the primary environment. Although she did not express how this changed her performance, it gave a sense of when it happened and perhaps the sense of change that occurs with the process.

Rowyn – Rowyn’s story was one of sadness and isolation; she didn’t view the new phase in her life as being positive and did not seem to be expecting the changes that came with the secondary school transition. She had feelings of guilt and anxiety about whether she had done the right thing for her daughter and was consumed by thoughts about whether she was a bad mother. She was also stuck between the reality of having to let her daughter become more independent and wanting to protect her fully from the world:

...you know, it’s very hard, I do think that she has got to find her own feet and got to learn to cope with things at the end of the day because that is the real world, isn’t it? But on my other side, it was very much that protective, I couldn’t protect her from all of that.
(Rowyn)

For Rowyn, these thoughts and feelings gave her a sense that she was not living up to being the mother she needed to be, and this had isolated her from her parents and made the relationship with her husband more distant. Part of this was also to do with the speed of change; she was dealing slowly with being the mother of a young adult:

...Yeah, I think that is the best way to describe it, it’s like having a different person in my life, and that makes me feel horrible just saying that, ermm. (Rowyn)

For Rowyn, the transition was difficult and these complications had taken the time that Rowyn needed to come to terms with a different set of situations. She didn’t talk about the future because she couldn’t cope with her present reality, therefore making the shift in her performance troubling and incomplete.

Sabine – As a mother of two daughters, Sabine had a relatively easy transition with her eldest and, although predicting a slightly less simple transition with her youngest, did not suffer with any anxiety surrounding the process. On reading the story, this seems to be because she had gone through the process with her eldest daughter seamlessly, treating her like an adult, allowing her to develop her independence, etc. Therefore, this made the transition easier as she had not been challenged by any of the changes that had occurred.

One of the key aspects of Sabine's performance of motherhood was taken from her expression of being a 'good mother', which she defined partly as doing the very best she could for her children:

...Because I just think that at the end of the day they can't really make those choices for themselves at that age, and I think that you are trying to get them the best that you can so that they've got the best foot forward. Once you give them those things, once you actually put those things for them, then really it's up to them how they use those tools as an opportunity, but at the end of the day if you're not giving the best tools you can give to start off with then, you know you, if you give them the best you can then you can't blame yourself if they don't you know use it really (Sabine)

For Sabine, performing as the 'good mother' allowed her to embed the transition and process into herself without much difficulty, but she did acknowledge the changes that it brought.

Scarlett – Scarlett's story of moving both of her children through the secondary transition was overlaid by her overwhelming performance as an intensive mother to her children and someone who was struggling to come to terms with the changes that the transition was bringing. Scarlett's story speaks of someone who is finding it difficult to let her children grow up and therefore embrace the young adults they were becoming:

...well actually he is really growing up and I need to step back and let him do things on his own and that. I think that links in with going to big school, if you like... it's now a conscious thing that I have to step back. (Scarlett)

This was embedded within a story of Scarlett moving the children around schools to gain the best education they could and being viewed by others as a 'helicopter mother'. However, these actions led to a problem in herself as a member of the village community, when other parents considered her as disloyal to the local village and school by rejecting it for a better education in a neighbouring village. This got so bad for Scarlett and her family that they had placed their family home on the market and were looking to move:

...we've just withdrawn a bit, we don't have contact with anyone in the village really, we are not comfortable in the village anymore so the house is actually on the market, partly because of that. (Scarlett)

The two performances of good mother and local community member competing against one another was difficult for Scarlett to navigate, although it is clear from her

story and the efforts she has gone to in order to secure the best education for the children, that motherhood was strongest but changing in order to incorporate the transition of her son.

Sophie – For Sophie, her story was one of acceptance. She spoke in a way that conveyed that she had come to terms with her reduced role as a mother and was happy to see her daughter gain some independence from her in going to secondary school. Reflecting on her role as a mother, Sophie commented:

...I think that my role as a mum continues even though you have to try and stand back to give them some independence, but you also know guidance has to be there and you can't let them get on with it in a way although you want to, you want to let them go and get on with it. (Sophie)

Therefore, Sophie saw her role as a mother differently after the transition than before. She seemed to understand that these were two different performances and that she had to make a change to enable her daughter to grow up. This acceptance of her new performance as a more distant mother, however, was compounded by the changes in communication that the process and transition had brought with it and how she knew very little about her daughter now in comparison to how she was in primary school. When discussing whether she knew as much about her daughter now as she did before, she stated:

...No I don't, and I guess that is probably hard in itself because, of course, we have, at Newdell you could chat to them at the end of the day and they would bring information

to you, but at, you don't even have to chat to parents anymore, because you used to stand at the school gates and have a chat for five minutes before you picked your child up, but now it's not cool to have Mum turn up at the gates, ermm, and I suppose because she is walking home independently ermm I don't get to speak to her and other people, I don't get to see the parents that I saw before. (Sophie)

For Sophie, this loss of communication, as well as losing the ties with the primary school, meant that she felt a little isolated from her daughter. From her perspective, she was unable to complete the very basics of nurturing that defined their relationship before, therefore leading to Sophie finding a new performance as a mother of a young adult.

